

HOW CAN THE CHILDREN GO FORWARD WITHOUT GUIDES
TO SHOW THE WAY? MENTORING FOR AT-RISK
AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

Doug Clark Purcell

Bachelor, New York Polytechnic, 1993
MBA, University of Phoenix, 2005
MDiv, Shaw Divinity School, 2010

Mentors

Lester A. McCorn, DMin
Jamison Hunter, DMin

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2017

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, OH**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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Date: _____

Approved: _____

Faculty Mentor: _____

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies: _____

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ABSTRACT

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The problem is that at-risk youth do not have a ministry to help reduce the challenges of being socially and economically disadvantaged. My hypothesis is that an Africentric mentoring program will improve self-esteem and prepare the youth for a better future. The goal of the project was to examine, evaluate, and implement a model of mentoring for at-risk African American youth. First Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina was the context. The methodological approach was hosting classes in black theology from a historic and Africentric perspective. Improved self-image is the anticipated outcome and will be directly proportional to the effectiveness of the mentoring classes. In conducting research, the following methods of evaluation were used as measurement instruments interviews, pre-test, post-tests, seminars, and surveys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to publically thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for the blessings and unmerited grace shown to me throughout my life. God has blessed me to have various mentors and guides throughout my life. They have often challenge, critiqued, and cajoled me to move past my comfort zones. Beginning with my late parents Laura and Nathan Purcell, I inherited your strong faith, and belief in God, as well as your disposition to consider and listen to other points of view. I miss you so much, thank you for raising me to believe in myself, resist the temptation to assume that I know more than I know, and to always look for the best in others and treat all people fairly.

My mentors Dr. Lester McCorn, Dr. Jamison Hunter, and Dr. Anthony Ledonne thank you for your advisement and stimulating conversations during the intensives and peer sessions. The Gardner Taylor Scholar Cohort, thanks for your commitment to social justice and the cause of the Gospel. Let me give a special shout out to Jaime Kowlessar, Charles Tyler, and Kenneth York we began this journey three years ago, and stayed the course.

Lastly, I owe my eternal gratitude to First Baptist church, the mentoring team, and twenty of the most talented kids I have had the privilege to get to know. Each of you helped to bring a vision into reality for the glory of God.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my wife and children. Robin, you have been my confidante, cheerleader, and companion. More than that, you soften my rough edges, and provide clarity to my often clinical approach to life. You are the love of my life and I thank God for every moment we share on this journey. Thanks for allowing me time to complete this project, while often shuffling family schedules in order to meet specific deadlines.

To the best kids any father could ever want. Akeem and Mya, I am honored to be your father, and I love you more each passing year. As I watch you grow and mature, it still amazes me how fast time goes, it was only yesterday that you were infants and I rocked you to sleep vowing to protect and keep you safe. Finally, I dedicate this project to my older brother John who died four months ago. John you were a second father to me, a mentor, and a classy man. I thank you for every word of advice, and admonishment over the years. You are the world's greatest Big Brother.

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INTRODUCTION

The church has been a blessing and a bewilderment to me. From my earliest days I been reared in the African American Baptist church. The church represents an enigma and a great source of encouragement. Yet, its actions are often inscrutable and difficult to understand or explain. Sometimes the church provides an emotional roller coaster ride. At times I was completely captivated by the stirring songs and emphatic preaching. Enamored by the church communal cushion reducing the harmful effects of a cruel world. The church provided certainty of a glorious eternal life after this earthly one has concluded. It affirmed that God loved me unconditionally and that I am part of God's good creation.

Yet, the church often baffled and confused me. It is frustrating to observe a church that offers such communal love to its members, frequently seem disinterested in the surrounding community. The church oftentimes appears to be above the historical and cultural obstacles confronting the community. It appears to only have inward and vertical concerns. These concerns helped birth this project. As an associate pastor, and YASS (Young Adult Sunday School) teacher my role was to help develop the next generation of church leadership.

In fact this was my dichotomy. On the one hand, the church provides a safe space to instill community values and nurturing. On the other hand, it appeared oblivious to the at-risk youth residing near the church. We focused on internal growth while neglecting

the need of the larger community. Which gives us a static position within the community. We essentially perform the same programs year after year, when the church rightful place is to engage the community. A church continually reaching inward is not true to its calling. As we move through history, the church should be the creative agents of God.

All things considered, this project is really a call to action for First Baptist Church. Reminding First Baptist to be true to its prophetic calling and implement an at-risk mentoring program. With the objectives to instill more self-esteem to the youth, and to introduce Africentricity, and black theology to at-risk youth. Going forward, the terms black and African American will be used synonymously. The assumption this project makes is that having a greater understanding of the contributions of Africans on the world stage will increase self-esteem. Also part of the mentoring program will teach critical thinking skills to youth between the ages ten through fourteen. This will help the youth become better thinkers and evaluators of information. Allowing them to critically analyze information, and collaborate with others who hold different viewpoints.

For example, we live in an ever increasing culturally diverse world. Success tomorrow requires the ability to collaborate and communicate with different cultures. So I will utilize my corporate and seminary training to accomplish this goal. This is a social justice issues because without the proper mentoring approach, these youth will become economically deprived adults. Many of these youth lack the family infrastructure to make a difference in their lives. The church can fill this vacuum with a mentoring program tailored for their needs.

Moreover, I wanted the youth to know more about their African culture. Was Africa really the Dark Continent? Is it reasonable to conclude that Africans are merely

takers of cultural improvements without contributing anything meaningful to society?

Did God limit creativity and intelligence exclusively to the peoples of Europe? These were questions I had as a youth, my intuition said no, but I did not have any valid alternative views to dispel these notions.

All things considered, this negative caricature of a group of people intentionally causes psychic and psychological harm. Which manifest as loathing, self-hate, and the inability to be comfortable within one's own skin. It also contributes to low self-esteem, and nihilistic behavior. This project has been an endeavor to share my love of the gospel as well as my desire to introduce Africentrism and black theology to the next generation. The vision is to link the gospel of Jesus Christ to at-risk African American youth. The gospel affirms the acceptance of all peoples. It further asserts that there is neither Greek nor Jew, confirming the equality of all humanity. This further validates the acceptance of all cultures. Meaning that when someone follows Jesus Christ it does not mean they disavow their culture. Yet I also reiterate that Africentrism and black theology are not anti-white. Nor is it anti any other ethnic group, it merely asserts our equal footing on the world stage.

I will teach at-risk youth about the empires of Mansa Musa, Nubia, Egypt, and Ethiopia. From a cultural perspective, Africentrism places Egypt back to its rightful place on the African continent. I will inform at-risk youth that African Americans had a history prior to American slavery. The first universities and libraries were located on the African continent. Socrates and other Greeks learned from the Egyptians. My goal is to amplify their understanding of African contributions to history and culture.

Above all, I do not want the next generation to share the erroneous beliefs I held as a youth. As a child, I felt puzzled that Africans did not contribute anything to world knowledge. In school, we only discussed European, and occasional Asian or Arab contributions but Africa was omitted from the discussion. When Egypt was presented, the images of the people were Eurocentric. Further perpetuating the myth that Africans were uncivilized brutes incapable of artistic or intellectual genius. This mentoring program will dispel these falsehoods.

The first chapter of this document identifies the context in which I reside. It is First Baptist Church located downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. The church is an old established church with over two hundred years of existence. It is situated in a less affluent area of downtown. During the civil rights movement, the church was a beacon for social justice. It has now become more of middle class oriented church, with half of its membership living in the outlying suburbs. The challenge to the church is to return to its social justice roots with an at-risk mentoring program for the neighborhood youth.

Chapter Two discusses the biblical foundation for the project. The coronation of David found in the Book of Samuel and the mentoring relationship between Paul and Timothy in Second Timothy are the scriptural references for the project. These scriptures denote the biblical justification for an at-risk youth mentoring program. The exegesis of the scriptures reveal that David and Timothy were potential at-risk youth. In the case of Timothy, the Apostle Paul mentored him in what it means to be a man of God and to lead the church.

Next, the historical and theological significance of the project were researched and occurs in chapters three and four respectively. For the historical portion, the origin of

the African American church was traced leveraging its social justice commitment since its inception. Beginning with the invisible church the project pointed out that Africans slaves incorporated their African culture with Christianity to create a unique church. The theological section is really a dialogue with various black, white, and womanist theologians. This approach was to reiterate the concept of embodied religion, which addresses the social, economic, psychological, and spiritual will beings for followers of Christ.

Chapter Five reviewed existing mentoring programs, which included both secular and religious mentoring paradigms. The mentoring models examined were not limited to African Americans, but included, white, and Latino frameworks. Similarly, male and females models of mentoring were examined. The discipline of psychology was used to understand the behavior exhibited by at-risk youth, and youth in general. The research was not strictly limited to African American youth, but was an all-encompassing approach appraising the psychological issues affecting at-risk youth. Coping mechanisms were evaluated to determine if they would be feasible and used in the mentoring program.

The final chapter of the research discusses the findings and the solution to the problem. This project has been as much of a journey for me as it has been for the youth. The voice of the youth was captured throughout the project. Too often the voice of the marginalized is extended without giving them a chance to speak for themselves. One of the goals of the project was to give the kids an opportunity to utilize their voice.

In addition, this project purpose was to increase at-risk youth self-esteem by introducing Africentrism and black theology. To show that our ancestors had a culture and sophisticated belief systems long before arriving in America. This goal was achieved

while being careful not to sound anti-white. Instead the purpose was to give the youth a glimpse into their own unique culture. They can now articulate some of the contribution Africa has made to the world.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The contextual location of First Baptist Church Raleigh, North Carolina is similar in many respects to most urban churches. First Baptist is a historic church located in the downtown area of Raleigh. The church demographics changed significantly in the past twenty years, and these changes significantly impacts the congregation. The changing demographics consist of an increased number of Mexican immigrants moving to the downtown area. These immigrants arrived seeking a better life for their families and employment opportunities in North Carolina. They have begun to buy older homes, open businesses, and assimilate within the community.

In addition to these positive aspects, there were detrimental and destructive ramifications with their migration to the downtown area. Downtown Raleigh has seen an increase in Latin gang activity. The primary Latin gangs located in the downtown area are VDM (Very dangerous Mexicans), Sur, and the Latin kings. These gangs are involved in drug sells, human trafficking, armed robbery, and prostitution. The African American gangs residing downtown are the Bloods and Cribs. These gangs are involved in the criminal underground economy, and these rival gangs are trying to increase territorial ground in the downtown area.

A logical recruiting population is the at-risk youth residing in this community. According to North Carolina public data on gang activity, 70% of gang members are

recruited between the ages eighteen to twenty-five years old.¹ Yet, the members began associations with the gangs at a much younger age. The actual affiliations begin as early as six years old.

In the midst of the economic, cultural, challenges confronting African American youth, this project goal is to develop a mentoring program for at-risk youth in the immediate neighborhood surrounding First Baptist Church. The aim is to start early and mentor African American at-risk youth to help prepare them to beat some of the odds found in the urban league report. These kids are the byproduct of a neglected community. My contention is the church should address the needs of its own community and provide encouragement through the African American church.

This mentoring program is for a specific context situated in Raleigh, North Carolina. I contend that a mentoring program for at-risk youth will benefit the community, church, society, and dramatically impact the lives of the youth. I believe that First Baptist history and the location uniquely qualifies us to respond to this outreach. The church has practiced social justice throughout its history.

From a geographic point of view, First Baptist is in a good position to interact with the at-risk youth community. The church physically resides in the middle of this community. There are opportunities to interact with the children living within this troubled area. Many of the children regularly attend Sunday school and worship services. First Baptist has been called the capital city church. The name plays well to respond to this problem. In addition, the church is located in the heart of the city with all its power structures and symbols. A view of the Governor's mansion and senate building faces

¹ N.C. Department of Public Safety, "Gangs of North Carolina," Governor's Crime Commission, March 2013, accessed November 14, 2015, <https://ncdps.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/div/GCC/PDFs/Pubs/Gangs2013.pdf>.

eastward. The supreme court building and several government buildings are viewable from the north end of the church. West of the church, on Wilmington Street are restaurants and a community park.

Unfortunately, on the west end adjacent the church, there is a large homeless population. One of the factors for the increased homeless population is a result of the former Republican governor and legislature closing down the mental hospital (Dorothy Dix). Other homeless include ex-military and drug abusers. The church has an outreach ministry for the homeless. This includes a service specifically for the homeless – Sunday mornings at 7:30 am. Also volunteers prepare breakfast each Sunday for the homeless in the church dining facility. During the service the associate ministers rotate leading praise and worship, preach, and administer the sacrament or Lord's Supper.

The demographics immediately surrounding the church and its adjacent neighborhoods is comprised of 50% African American, 45% White, and 5% Latino. When viewing the entire downtown Raleigh region, the ethnic makeup looks different. Within a five mile radius of Peace Street, the 2010 census, revealed that 55% of the citizen's ethnicity was white, 32.3% African American, Asian and Pacific Islander comprised 3.7%, American Indian 0.7%, some other race alone, 4.7%, Hispanic origin 9.7%. The population by age: is shown in Table 1. The proposed research project will mentor to the largest concentrated age group in the immediate vicinity of the church.

Table 1. Population of downtown Raleigh by age

2010 Census Population by Age	Percentage
0 – 4	5.6%
5 – 9	5.3%
10 – 14	22.6%
15 – 24	22.6%
25 – 34	19.0%
35 – 44	14.3%
45 – 54	11.3%
55 – 64	3.2%
65 – 74	2.2%
75 – 84	0.7%

Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau, "Raleigh Downtown Demographics, U.S. Census 2010," accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=37>.

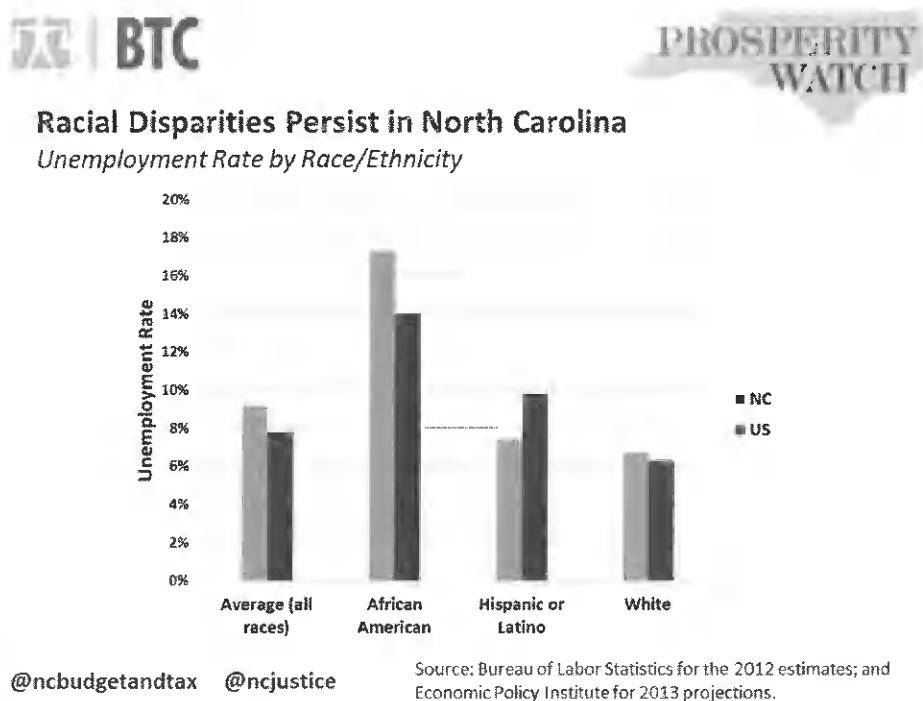


Figure 1. Unemployment rate by race/ethnicity in North Carolina and U.S.

Figure 1 above show the wide disparity of unemployment in the downtown area.²

This has affected many of the congregants. The church consists of a mix of highly educated, successful, middleclass members who commute from the suburbs of Cary and North Raleigh. The other segment of the membership is comprised of folks living in the less affluent downtown area. The church has two Sunday morning worship services to accommodate the large membership.

According to church attendance records, 70% of the downtown congregation attends the 8:00 a.m. worship service. As mentioned previously, this is a non-traditional service with emphasis on teaching, praise, and worship. According to church leaders, this service nearly equals the contribution of the older more established 11:00 a.m. service. Therefore this sector of membership will participate in the research project. Primarily to address the need for a mentorship program for at-risk youth.

At-Risk Youth Mentorship Program

The National Urban League use a tool called the equality index to compare the condition between blacks and whites in America.³ The tool evaluates the health, economic, social justice, and civic engagement between the groups. Not surprising, blacks lag behind whites in every category except civic engagement. It is true as the Black Lives Matter movement reminds us, that response to systemic police brutality

² Allan Freyer, "Economic Recovery Continues to Bypass African Americans," North Carolina Justice, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=budget-and-tax/prosperity-watch-issue-24-no-2-economic-recovery-continues-bypass-african-americans>.

³ National Urban League, "The State of Black America 2006: Annual Report on Socio-Economic Conditions," accessed November 9, 2014, <http://www.nul.org/stateofblackamerica.html>.

evoke civic engagement. The equality index indicators reveal that for all the gains African Americans have made, there is still much work to do.

Moreover, the progress African Americans have made to date often lead to resentment and callousness from some in the dominant culture. Many Americans feel that African Americans have been compensated - paid in full for the past atrocities of slavery and the Jim Crow years. Yet the facts do not support this conclusion. Instead African Americans are still experiencing cuts in social programs, the rise of hate groups, and political apathy towards their plight.⁴

The motivation to develop an at-risk mentoring program originates from personal reasons and is close to my heart, because I would have been classified as an at-risk youth. There is a natural affinity to minister to other left behind youth. The church mentored and contributed immensely to the person I have become. Like many at-risk youth I was left behind from an economic, educational, sociological, and cultural sense. If it had been for the grace of God, and the beloved church, my life could have easily taken another direction and the arc of this direction would not have pointed in a positive direction.

While the mentoring program should not be viewed as a quick fix to a complicated issue, the project seeks to institute a mentoring program that acts as a counterbalance to the impact of many structural obstacles. Fundamentally, the aim is to connect and reach out to kids ages ten through fourteen, who do not fit into the social status quo. Many of these kids are economically, and sociological outcasts. Who do not easily fit into middleclass oriented churches? They often fall within the fringe of society.

⁴ Homer U. Ashby Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 1.

Many view themselves as being rejected by the mainstream culture, and often by middle class oriented African American churches.

My premise is that developing a mentoring program grounded in the word of God, and black theology will increase cultural awareness and offer a corrective worldview for at-risk youth. The word of God when applied within its proper context, confirms the equality of all humanity. Black Liberation theology serves to reinforce the significance of the African culture. Not to make it superior, but articulate Africentrism as an equal contributor with other cultures. This approach will help at-risk youth forge a positive image of themselves and their peers.

In parallel, mentors will provide training in critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. These are essential skillsets for the twenty-first century. The next component of the mentoring program consists of access to positive role models who serve as mentees and help positively influence the children lives.

The utilization of mentees is necessary because the reality is that some of these kids do not have positive role models to emulate. It is important to include female and male role models. So that girls and boys can identify with role models representing their gender. Equally important is that at-risk youth's voices must be heard. Many of these children exhibit powerless behavior. Such as thinking their situation will never change. Depicting an unhealthy view of their lives and future. Therefore, at-risk youth must regain a renewed sense of confidence and increased self-esteem. This mentoring program seeks to do so by helping at-risk youth rediscover their unique God given voice. This means the mentoring program will provide at-risk children opportunities to instruct the mentors in technology.

For purposes of this study the use of technology will be limited to mobile application. Let's be honest, many of these kids are far more technically savvy than most church leaders. After all, they're born into the digital age. Many of them have never seen a landline phone; they are truly the digital generation.

Even with all this inherent potential, the sad reality is that at-risk youth are more likely to drop out of high school, and to become a casualty of the criminal justice system. My premise is that developing a mentoring program grounded in the word of God, as well as, focusing on critical thinking, communication, and collaboration are essential. These are life-enhancing skills that can be used to further an education, become an entrepreneur, or obtain a high paying job.

Borrowing thought from Lester McCorn, the church is the last link or bridge with the vernacular community.⁵ We should be invested in the community and understand the language and idiosyncrasies of our folks better than anyone else. Another tenet of Afrocentric ministries is to develop mentoring programs to empower at-risk youth. It is vitally important that role models represent the ethnic makeup of the mentees. As mentioned earlier, many of these kids do not have positive role models at home. A mentoring program benefits the church as well. It facilitates secession planning. Therefore, implementing a mentoring program is a practical endeavor as well as a part of the church missionary outreach. It also reestablishes the historical tradition of the African American church of leading community engagement and empowerment strategies. The project is designed to generate awareness within the church and encourage the church to commit resources to address the needs of at-risk youth. The specific resources consist of financial contributions and human capital.

⁵ Lester Agyei McCorn, *Standing on Holy Ground* (Chicago, IL: MMGI Books, 2013), 41.

The motivation to implement or start a mentoring program for at-risk youth stems from the affinity for at-risk youth from personal life experiences. As the youngest child of Laura and Nathan Purcell and the youngest of six children, I had inherent mentors in my family. Another aspect of my birth order is that the nearest sibling to my age (a brother) is a thirteen years age difference. My arrival on this earth corresponded to my parent's entering middle age and my older siblings mentored me throughout my life.

This mentoring practice started in my family long before my grandparents left the farms of North Carolina, during the black exodus from the south to the industrial north. There was a tradition of older members in the family mentoring or schooling younger family members. So when my grandparents exchanged the cotton and tobacco fields of North Carolina, for the domestic kitchens and factories of Long Island New York the tradition was embedded in their family traditions.

My childhood has a direct correlation in many ways to some of my religious views today. Especially the need to interact within the communities we serve. In most respects the early childhood years was an enjoyable experience. The majority of my childhood was spent in church services. My father and mother were church folks in the typical sense of the word. My father was actively involved in the church and my mother was a Sunday School Teacher.

My folks were not highly educated both were high school graduates. They married young and did not pursue a college education. They were too busy rearing their family, working, and paying the bills. Coincidentally my oldest sister is twenty-three years older than me and her oldest son, is twenty-eight days younger than me. He has always seemed to be more like a brother than a nephew. As a matter of fact, all four of

my sister's children are more like siblings than my actual siblings. It always felt natural to me because we're so close in age.

I grew up playing with my nephew and neighborhood friends. We would go to New Castle Park play basketball, swim, and play handball. On Sunday afternoons we would go to the park and watch the grownups play softball. The kids cheered for their favorite teams, and it was a show of community solidarity. The adults appeared to have as much fun as the kids, talking smack, and cheering on their favorite teams. Often the softball teams represented the various factories where the men worked. They would also wear the uniforms supplied by the factories. The games were a form of community cohesiveness or solidarity. In a way the softball games gave the men opportunity to showcase their athletic swagger and physical prowess.

On my tenth birthday, my life changed forever. My mother died suddenly from what I discovered later was heart failure. She was fifty-two years old, and died while I spent the night with my sister and her family. Needless to say, I was devastated. My world was turned upside down. It wreaked havoc on our family structure. My father did not handle my mother's loss very well. He was consumed with grief and I believe that he was suffering from depression. As I recollect now, his depression lasted several years.

Although he was able to function daily, he did not show much interest in me during this period. I recall that my father's personality changed. Prior to my mother's passing he was an energetic, outgoing, and assertive person. Afterwards, he became more introspective, and recluse. He remarried three years after my mother's death. By my thirteenth birthday, I felt like more of an afterthought, than a member of his revamped family. I say this because my father really did not meaningfully engage in my life after

remarrying. I did not have any real guidance and like many young teens I rebelled. My grades suffered and I went from an honor student to cutting classes and hanging out with troubled kids.

During this period, the church and my siblings became an anchor. I had positive male and female role models who encouraged and spent time with me. They reiterated that I mattered and helped me to focus on my life and what all that meant as a young black boy. They encouraged me to pursue my love of mathematics and science. Helping me to understand that science and faith are not mutually exclusive, but that science often helps us understand the creation more fully. I was fortunate to have an extended church family who functioned as positive role models and mentors.

My deeply held belief is that every human being has value and talent. So I am focused on helping at-risk youth embrace their uniqueness and tune into their value. I believe all human beings have a God given gift or special talent, and that God treasures everyone. My plan is to incorporate ministerial and corporate skills for the mentoring program to help bring these God given gifts to the forefront.

The assessment of my ministerial skills is based on the role of associate pastor for the last seven years. During this time, I've led the young adult Sunday school class with the millennials (age group twenty-one to thirty-five), and they prefer a more nuanced approach to church and study. This is not to say, they want to dismantle traditional ways of church. Instead, they wanted a more qualitative and substantive interaction with each other and the surrounding community. In other words, they were not so much tethered to the church building. They sought innovative ways to utilize technology to stay in touch with each other during the week. We incorporated weekly prayer conference calls, emails

for prayer, and link collaboration software to bond beyond the church walls. These technological tools are effective for this postmodern technically savvy generation. I also created a core teaching team. The team meets twice a week (usually at restaurants or someone's home) to select the class topic and themes for the next six months. As the church leader assigned to the group, my purpose was to act as facilitator and ensure the core teachers were biblically grounded and prepared to teach their respective topics.

The core team is young professionals. The professions vary from attorneys, educators, business leaders, to folks with advanced engineering and computer science degrees. They are young successful African Americans who possess the necessary skillset to empower at-risk youth. These mentees are well versed in collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills, which are necessary for at-risk youth. My premise is that a mentoring program grounded in these skillsets will help prepare at-risk students to succeed. It is not the goal of the program to steer the kids in the direction of a particular career track, but to develop the skills needed to succeed in the classroom and life.

The corporate training and the theological training will meet at the crossroads to develop and implement an at-risk program. Many people discounted me as a nerdy kid who did not fit into the community. To some extent their observations were true. Meaning, I was a bit of a nerd. The nerd factor fared well for my electrical engineering degree and the master of business degree. The masters of divinity will prove beneficial from the theological perspective. However, as a youth, I did everything feasible to blend in with my environment and to gain acceptance and tribal identity. As William Epps puts it, I lived my life between the promise of my potential and the possibility of my

fulfillment.⁶ According to the sermon of Epps, is that somewhere in life we often get stuck between our current circumstances, and future aspirations. His sermon retells the story of the patriarch Abraham awaiting the long promised son. Abraham became frustrated because of the delayed promises but as the sermon highlights, that some things only God can provide. I recognized this concept early during my youth.

This is one of the life lessons I want to relay to at-risk youth. That some desires and aspirations only God can provide. The most important thing is to live and be who God created you to be. Also don't give up on your hopes and dreams. Ignore the deceptive chatter which devalue your personhood. The mentoring program can help counter some of these harmful messages. Mentoring at-risk youth will allow the church to genuinely and honestly examine their current setting. The fundamental question seems to be: does the church want to move beyond apathy and the status quo? This project will challenge the church to reimagine its purpose, which is to positively affect the community and improve the economic, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the community she serves. This line of thought aligns to Ammerman's three-line song, which give credence to any mentoring program, "I am the Church; You are the Church; We are the Church together."⁷

Not only does this simple song reinforce and reaffirm the brother and sisterhood of all believers. It has the potential when thoroughly reflected upon to heal the ills, which hinder some churches. These three lines pact tremendous theological vigor and it reaffirms the communal nature of the church. Outreach and mentoring should be a natural

⁶ J. Douglas Wiley and Ivan Douglas Hicks, *Submissions to the Dean: Gardner C. Taylor* (Chicago, IL: UMI Books, 2009), 73.

⁷ Nancy Ammerman et al., eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 134.

part of the church's ecosystem. It reasserts the importance of the church, a complex social organism functioning as a single unit. The song draws attention away from individualistic agendas, and squarely put priority on the community of believers. At-risk youth cannot be fractured from the church instead they must be embraced and fully nurtured and mentored by the church.

1 Corinthians 12:12 puts it more succinctly, "just as a body though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ."⁸ This verse depicts the urgency of believers to suspend individual notions of what it means to be the church today, and look at the larger picture. In some instances it require shedding preconceived expectations and focusing on doing whatever it takes to help the church live up to its credo, which was established by Jesus Christ. It is part of the larger picture or long-term view supposing that each member focus and work toward things necessary for the church to retain its vitality. In a sense, it means balancing competing demands of having one foot anchored in the past, and the other forward looking toward the future. More specifically, acknowledging the need for change to address the concerns of a changing environment.

This means that one conception of God can never be absolute. That is to say, because God is majestic and to be feared or respected to encounter him is to be encountered by that which can never be mastered.⁹ This notion makes room for an inclusive church because it is the recognition that no one has a monopoly with God. Different perspectives must be heard in order to identify the direction God is leading believers.

⁸ Biblical citations within this document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise.

⁹ John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 28.

Consequently, First Baptist has a unique beginning. It holds the distinction of being one of the first integrated churches in the south. From the beginning, First Baptist has been a source of hope and healing for the surrounding communities. The sons and daughters of slaves and former slave masters practiced and incorporated (Colossians 3:11). They realized there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcised, or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all. First Baptist, ahead of its time, embraced the diversity of God's humanity.

However, the Church, like all institutions inevitably succumbs to inertia. The church is at a crossroad, and must decide which path to pursue. Do we follow the path of comfort and least resistance? Or does the church embrace its rich history and change to meet the changing environment? The congregation can either choose to do nothing. In my opinion, this would lead to a malignant staleness, possibly impeding the church growth and financial solvency.¹⁰ Granted Alinsky contributed heavily to my understanding and his idea specifically refers to political inaction, which can be expanded and incorporated for any organization. Any organization that doggedly remains past oriented succumbs to inertia and stagnancy. If First Baptist remain anchored in its past and avoid looking toward the future it will become less effective.

I am not advocating discarding the past or diminishing the traditions of the church. Instead, I propose an intergenerational approach to breathing new life and praxis in the twenty-first century church. It is fitting as our Lord transcends time, space, culture, and history. The message of the Gospel should be handed down from one generation to the next. It also needs to be encapsulated into language appropriate for the present generation, which will require reassessment of some tightly entrenched beliefs. The act

¹⁰ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York, NY: Vantage Ebooks, 2008), 7.

of reassessment often prevents spiritual arrogance or thinking one has the final say on God's plan. Reassessment also shows true commitment to God because it requires reflection, and a will to do what is necessary to grow in the knowledge of God.

I agree with Ammerman's position that, "membership changes over time. Yet, the fundamental decision for the membership remains. Do I commit and stay with this body of believers."¹¹ In other words, a conscious act has to be made. I believe that part of this conscious effort is the willingness to work with church leaders and congregants to resolve conflict and strife. This applies to disputes about worship style and financial distributions.

First Baptist has 600 members listed. Yet, only a third of these folks actively contribute to the church wellbeing. By wellbeing, I mean attend service, volunteer for ministry, and contribute regularly financially. The real challenge is to revitalize membership participation with a common cause to do the work God has mandated we undertake.

The second dynamic and need is the shift in First Baptist culture. This shift exposes some uncomfortable realities. Both sides of the shift view the other with suspicion. The divide really falls along generational lines for the most part. The baby boomer's generation has the majority of leadership and has set the direction of the church.

I believe that my training and life experience prepared me for churches that need mentoring programs. The main strength I have developed over the years is that of consensus building. My business school training, as well as leading different corporate projects helped me develop facilitation skills. These projects required me to work together with people from all generations. Part of my training focused primarily on

¹¹ Nancy Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations*, 138.

communicating intergenerational to resolve cross-organizational challenges. This means that I work with folks belonging to the baby boomer, generation X, and millennial generations. My belief is the same approach can be used in any organizational environment.

Also, I believe that my family birth order prepared for this task as well. I am the youngest in my family with siblings as much as twenty-three years older than me. So in a way, I have always had to become a good listener. My early life experiences taught me to listen attentively to others points of view. It also provided me a sense of wanting to consider other people points of view. I quickly learned that we all bring different views based upon our life experiences and varying backgrounds. In my family context as the youngest, the expectation was that I would learn from my parents and older siblings. I quickly discovered that age alone does not necessarily equate to wisdom. Experiences vary among people belonging to the same families and ethnicities. I have learned in professional and family life that uniting folks for a common purpose means understanding their context.

Similarly, learning cannot be a one-way conversation, where the person dispensing knowledge assumes to know all. In my opinion, that contributes to an oppressive learning encounter. It neglects to recognize any differences in life experiences. This is no less important when considering cultural similarities. In other words, just because I belong to a certain family or ethnic group does not mean we have the same point of view on all issues.

A primary resistance to implementing a mentoring program maybe a generational issue. The pastor and half the ministerial staff are baby boomers and half of the church is

sixty-five years of age or older. The other half of the church is considerably younger and wants to become more involved in leadership matters. The older generation seems to want to rest and relish in the church past. Many in this group tend to have an easy enjoyment in the past accomplishments of the church.

Contrast this mindset with the younger congregants and these members are more apt to embrace the mentoring project. They are more forward thinking and want to understand how church tradition can be more relevant for today's Christians. An example of this mindset is the younger members want to utilize technological resources into the worship experience. For instance, they suggested providing Wi-Fi in all the church buildings, so that members with smartphones and tablets could read their digitized Bibles. The older members resist because the church finances are faltering. The younger members want to start a blog, weekly prayer conference calls, social gatherings or pot lucks to cement relational bonds. The older members resist this idea by reminding the younger folks of the Wednesday night Bible class, and the Friday prayer services. There are good opportunities for shared learning. Instead of becoming entrenched in an immobile view, I see openings for partnerships. Instead of both groups digging in on styles of worship, I believe they should seek a spirit of unity.

Likewise, I believe in intergenerational churches because the church embodies the family of Jesus Christ, and like any family, it is multi-generational. That's the beauty of the body of Christ; we pass down spiritual legacies from one generation to another and each current generation, add their unique imprint on the church. My goal is to solicit support for the mentoring program from the entire church family.

Support has to be corporately agreed upon. It cannot come from one segment of the church, or the church will be divided, which would go against the unity of God's church. Instead I am actively soliciting support from the entire congregation. As mentioned previously, I believe in a collaborative minded church. While it is true younger folks are more technically savvy. Older saints still have valuable information to share. Many are mature saints, and have many varied life experiences. Imagine the value of sharing these experiences with at-risk youth. It would be such a benefit for any mentoring program and would enhance a mentoring effort designed for at-risk youth. I see opportunity for partnerships. Instead of both groups becoming bogged down with styles or previous ways of doing things. I contend that as the body of believers we should seek a spirit of cohesiveness.

Likewise, I believe in intergenerational churches because the church embodies the family of Jesus Christ, and like any family, transcends generations. As the body of Christ; we pass down lessons learned from one generation to another and each current generation, ingrain their distinct stamp on the church. The at-risk mentoring project is one way to pass down First Baptist spiritual legacy.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

First Samuel 16:1-13 has been selected for the Old Testament scripture and First Timothy 4:6-10 for the New Testament. These texts were chosen to help implement a strategy to address the issue of at-risk youth. Both texts confirm the belief that the church should not overlook these distressed and often oppressed youth. As Jesus representation on earth, the church must meet the need of these left behind youth. The task can be accomplished by incorporating a mentoring program built upon a cooperative approach. Collaborative in the sense that the at-risk youth will not merely be soaking up information, but will also be sharing technological insights to the mentees. These scriptures validate the worth of David and Timothy. Both youth were situated outside the familial and societal power structures. Yet, both at-risk youth were instrumental and consequential leaders for God's purposes in their respective generations. Therefore, we can surmise that at risk youth with the right mentoring approach grounded in Christian teachings are positioned to make relevant contributions for their time.

Each text provides a demonstration of God's sovereignty when selecting leaders. God finds greatness in those others often considers inconsequential. Both texts also displayed how God nurtured, shaped, and groomed these leaders for service in their respective generations. Additionally, it is noted that God often uses the marginal and least impressive for service. These texts helped reaffirm the belief that God choices in leaders,

are often in direct opposition to what human beings discern as necessary leadership qualities and often God's selection goes against societal norms.

These scriptures reveal that in many cases, those whom culture, family, or society discards God often elevates. David and Timothy are prime examples of leaders chosen specifically for God's purposes. Neither had a favored or inside track to prominence. These texts outline the cultural, familial, and social stigma of these phenomenal leaders. Both texts are included in this introductory section and a describe description will be provided in this section. The chapter will provide an exegesis of the Old Testament text and conclude with an analysis of the New Testament text. The chapter will conclude with an identical exegetical rubric for both Old and New Testament scriptures analysis.

Old Testament

The Old Testament scripture is First Samuel 16:1-10 which states,

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chose' this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There

remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Five biblical translations were used to develop the framework for the exegetical investigation, which include the New International Version (NIV), New English Bible (NEB), New American Bible (NAB), King James Version (KJV) and finally settling on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Each version’s central theme reveals that Saul is being displaced as king of Israel by an unknown son of Jesse. However, this is not an arbitrary decision on God’s part. Saul displayed serious lapses of faith and judgment. God using Samuel as proxy, commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalek for what they did to Israel. It is striking and coincidental that the Amalekites are distant relatives of Israel. Amalek descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, son of Isaac, and grandson of the Jewish patriarch Abraham. The Amalekites are now a wandering dessert tribe –the grandchildren of Esau.¹

More importantly, Saul disobeyed a direct command from God via the prophet Samuel. According to Samuel in chapter fifteen, God ordered Saul to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites because of their treatment of Israel when they left Egypt. God relayed the message to Saul that he was reminded of what the Amalekites did as they entered the Promised Land. Amalek ambushed and killed the folks in the rear. In essence, the

¹ Louis H. Feldman, *Remember Amalek! Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), 272, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=357285&fulltextType=SC&fileId=S0364009405220172>.

Amalekites were public enemy number one. This wandering ~~desert~~ tribe failed to repent of their treatment of Israel.

Incidentally their transgression according to the prophet Samuel against Israel required ethnic extermination. God commanded Saul to destroy men, women, children, and animals to avenge the Amalekites premeditated attack on Israel. This command raises disturbing ethical question about the slaughter of innocent. After all, were the women, infants, and animals involved in the Israeli ambush? How is Saul to resolve the ethical tension between his hesitancy to carrying out the command, and the religious obligation to obey Yahweh's directives?

Gerald Cromer's article, "*Amalek Interpreting a Violent Biblical Narrative*" offers helpful insight for contemporary audiences. His article provides insight from a historical and modern perspective insights as to how dehumanization consists of stages. In other words, Cromer is saying that dehumanization does not occur in a vacuum. Meaning the process is a deliberate concerted effort to make the intended victim appear as other than human. He asserts that Jewish portrayal of Amalek, suggests that othering often comprises two stages.² The first stage Israel's enemies are depicted as the embodiment of physical and spiritual evil. The second stage links the group to be detrimental to the nation's survival.

Louis Feldman article published in the *Cambridge Online Journal*, suggests the Jewish people exhibited psychotic behavior toward their Amalekite neighbors.³

² Feldman, *Remember Amalek!*, 272, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=357285&fulltextType=SC&fileId=S0364009405220172>.

³ Feldman, *Remember Amalek!*, 272, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=357285&fulltextType=SC&fileId=S0364009405220172>.

Suggesting their commitment to completely destroy the Amalekites stemmed more from a mental illness than following the directive of God. His viewpoint is akin to a mass hysteria against the Amalekites. As seen by Feldman insinuation that the Jewish nation held a collective schizophrenia with a collective consciousness that escapes reality. This suggests that mass genocide of the Amalekite nation stemmed more from their own neurosis than from God's mandate of a holy or just war. He links this idea to current Islamic jihadist rationale and, reiterates the idea is as old as human history.

On the other hand, Eugene Korn attempts to resolve the ethical and religious tension in his article "*Moralization in Jewish Law: Genocide, Divine Command, and Rabbinic Reasoning*." His argument consists of two parts: A Kierkegaardian argument, that God's commands trump any ethical or religious tension. Specifically, he argues that God has the long-term view in mind. That is to say, God sees the inherent good in violent actions.⁴ Therefore, fulfilling the contradiction between ethical and religious duty, would lead to the nation's glorious future. It is reminiscent of a divine principle, where the means justify the end. Meaning a moral dilemma is offset by equating it to a greater good outcome. That God's commands are far superior to human ethos.

Secondly, Korn indicates that the divine command theory asserts there can be no contradiction between God's command, and any ethical reservation. The logic to this position, indicates that God sets the ethical parameters and standard for all human interaction.⁵ The previous analysis helped to appropriately establish the context. Reading five biblical translations helped to provide additional insight for the chosen Old

⁴ Eugene Korn, "Moralization in Jewish Law: Genocide, Divine Commands, and Rabbinic Reasoning," 2006, accessed February 2, 2015, http://edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/KORN_5_2.pdf.

⁵ Korn, "Moralization in Jewish Law," accessed February 2, 2015, http://edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/KORN_5_2.pdf.

Testament text. The versions fundamentally agree that God sent his trusted prophet Samuel to censure Saul for a blatant act of disobedience, and to inform Saul this sin has cost him the throne. Why? Because Saul did not carry out God's destruction in the manner God proscribed.⁶ Samuel did as God directed, but continued to grieve over Saul's imminent departure from the throne. He did not seem to be eagerly awaiting this event.

God directed Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse's sons as the new king. Samuel was hesitant, and presented excuses for going to Bethlehem to appoint this mysterious new king. The text does not seem out of place. In reality, it does snugly act as an anchor delineating the passing of the monarchy from Saul to David. It is a biblical narrative capturing the imminent transition of the monarchy. It has plot, intrigue, and tension, which overlay all good narrative. Samuel's primary concern manifested as fear for his safety and life. After all, there is no vacancy in the regal office. Such an act would naturally position Samuel as Saul's enemy. Walter Brueggemann indicates that the coronation of a new king was risky business when one was already on the throne.⁷ This would be considered treason and insurrection. God gave Samuel a plan that would both satisfy Saul's suspicion and provide a realistic motive for going to Bethlehem. God provided directions that appear unseemly. It is a ruse to mask Samuel visit to the south.⁸ Samuel was told to take a heifer to disguise the purpose of his visit. The heifer would be used to perform a sacrifice. Samuel takes the heifer as directed, but the implication of this

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), Kindle Location, 2350.

⁷ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Kindle Location, 2378.

⁸ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Kindle Location, 2378.

act suggests divine authorization for deception.⁹ The implication is that God will lie if necessary in order to secure the kingdom for David. This raises serious theological angst. Seitz offers insights to help clarify this seemingly moral contradiction. According to Seitz, prophets often manage or influence skillfully theological and historical statements to fit cultural accepted norms.¹⁰ That is, prophets often use theological imagination to further Yahweh's causes. This may manifest as a mixture of the prophet's words and the words of Yahweh in order to finalize God's commands.

Samuel is commissioned to go to Jesse, to Bethlehem, outside the reach of Saul's Northern kingdom. This is in every way a dispatch into new territory. God has recognized a new king. "I have provided a king amongst his sons." The verb "*raah*" provided is ambiguous. It can mean Yahweh has seen one who was already there, or it may mean Yahweh has gone about actively to secure one.¹¹ Either way the selection of David is settled before Samuel makes the first move. This act depicts Yahweh sovereignty. The challenge with the methodology of selecting a new king is that in biblical times the king normally held the office for life, and monarchies are typically hereditary. Succession follows the bloodline of the king to a legitimate heir. The Israelite kings were sometimes called "son of God" (Psalm 27, Isaiah 9:6). Since God is the true King, Israel kings may also be viewed as princes.¹² Another title is "anointed one" (1 Sam, 2:35, Psalm: 132:17), a designation from which the term Messiah is derived.

⁹ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Kindle Location, 2390.

¹⁰ Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academia, 2007), 94.

¹¹ Jacob L. Wright, *David, King of Israel and Caleb in Biblical Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Kindle Location, 44.

¹² Wright, *David, King of Israel*, Kindle Location, 48.

In the Hebrew Bible, the concept of kingship was different from that of the monarchies of Egypt or Mesopotamia. Their kingship was defined as divinely conferred political power that existed from the beginning of time.¹³ In Israel, kingship was a relatively late development. Even at the height of the Jewish monarchy, the Israelites cherished a distant past when they were ruled directly by God in a theocracy. God developed champions and deliverers such as: Moses, Joshua, and various charismatic judges for various situations. The name judges “*shophetim*” in the Hebrew language can be misleading, these judges functioned more in an advocacy role for the disadvantaged and rendered justice.¹⁴

Having rejected one king, Yahweh sends Samuel to Bethlehem to find another one. The task proves more difficult for the nervous prophet, who fears the reprisal of Saul. The sons of Jesse parade before him and each are refused or rejected in turn. Brothers Eliab, Abinadab, Shimea, Nethaniel, Raddai, Ozem, Elihu, all pass with God rejecting them in succession.¹⁵ Finally, the youngest son is brought in from the pastures and immediately confirmed by Yahweh as his chosen king.¹⁶

When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, he is met with suspicion and wariness. What is the cause of this ambivalent welcome? The elders seem terrified of his arrival, perhaps because of the prophetic office held by Samuel or the anxiety could have stemmed from the political environment within the culture. Scholars suggest the political nature was likely the rationale of the nervous tension of the arrival of Samuel. The elders realized

¹³ Wright, *David, King of Israel*, Kindle Location, 48.

¹⁴ Wright, *David, King of Israel*, Kindle Location, 55.

¹⁵ P. Kyle McCarter, *First Samuel: A New Translation with Introductory Notes* (Garden City, NY: Cambridge Press, 2008), 273.

¹⁶ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

that Samuel was both king maker and king breaker.¹⁷ Others focused on the practical question such as the terrain of Judah. Bethlehem was located in a rugged mountainous area surrounded by their enemies.¹⁸ Therefore, one would question, why would Samuel travel to such a harsh and remote location to offer sacrifices? One final option was that the elders suspected Samuel was there to levy more taxes at Saul's bequest? Most historical geographers believed that originally the city functioned as an administrative location for the collection of taxes and administrative purposes.¹⁹

Either scenario was a risky proposition for the leaders of the region, which caused reason for concern. It was not a scheduled meeting, reserved months earlier and it was uncommon for high officials of the court to come to remote villages, especially unannounced. The more likely scenario was that Samuel visited the south to gather resources for the court. Or, an equally dangerous proposition was that he no longer had allegiances with Saul, and came to this isolated region to hide out. Either choice put the region in jeopardy.²⁰ They did not know the reason for his arrival in the region. Little did they know that Samuel was there – not on an errand for Saul, but to anoint someone from their community to rule in Saul's place? The narrative continues with a preparation for the sacrifice, and Jesse and his sons were ceremoniously prepared for the sacrifice.

To help alleviate the elder's fears, Samuel speaks the words Yahweh provided for him. Did the elders actually believed the explanation, or did it still appear implausible for Samuel to travel such great distances to sacrifice? Surely, there were other villages closer

¹⁷ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Kindle Location, 2402.

¹⁸ Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2010), Kindle Location, 3299.

¹⁹ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 3299.

²⁰ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7102.

to the north. In any event, the drama continues. In order of birth, the sons of Jesse are paraded before Samuel. One by one, the story continues. Ironically, Samuel is the only one that knows why this is occurring. Jesse and the elders are unaware that they are witnesses to a decisive and divine act in Israel's future and history. Samuel erroneously assumes Eliab will be the new king. His superficial assumption is because of Eliab's height and physical appearance.

God speaks directly to Samuel and reminds him not to be distracted by physical appearance.²¹ It is important that God specifically highlight Eliab's height and appearance. Saul had similar characteristics and proved to be an ineffective leader. Israel did not need another Saul; they needed a leader with the right heart and temperament for this particular moment in the nation's history. Samuel rejected Eliab.

Similarly, Abinadab, Shammah, and all seven of Jesse's sons were rejected. Bruggeman emphasizes the fact Jesse had seven sons, and seven indicates completion.²² Only then, does Samuel ask if there are other sons. This illustrates the fact that David was outside the completed number. Was David viewed defective, unimpressive, with no claims to make, and no credentials to present? Yet, Samuel suspends the process until the youngest son is brought to the event.

Samuel halted the process for the youngest son whom Jesse (his father) did not refer to by name. However, this unnamed eighth son, caused the elders and Samuel to wait respectfully for his arrival. We can only speculate how long they waited. But, it must have taken some time, because he was outside the house, tending sheep. From a narrative

²¹ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7102.

²² Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7102.

perspective, it not only causes Jesse's household to wait, but it forces the reader to pause as well. The story waits just as Israel has waited for a true king.²³

Finally David arrives, and God says this is the one. Ironically the narrator still describes David's appearance, after God had warned Samuel not to pay attention to physical appearance.²⁴ Yahweh values a right heart over physical attributes. Yet, David is handsome, which did not disqualify him, it is simply an addendum to his other attributes. The text clearly highlights the fact that David was handsome, and had beautiful eyes. David receives the anointing of the oil in a private unpublicized ceremony. Nothing is said by David or to David. The text is silent. Did the seven brothers kneel to David? Did they congratulate him? What did Jesse say? It appears David received the anointing silently and passively.²⁵ The text only indicates the Spirit of the Lord was with David from that day onward.

Samuel pours the oil on David's head and Yahweh's spirit takes charge of him. The story derives its interest from the folklore motif of the seventh or eighth son who rises above his brothers.²⁶ David is "*haqqatan*," the youngest and his selection over Eliab and the others emphasize the miraculous nature of the event as a whole, and points in particular to the freedom of the divine choice in the naming of the king.²⁷ As in case of the election of a man from the smallest clan of the smallest tribe to be the next king,

²³ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7115.

²⁴ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7115.

²⁵ Rasmussen, *Zondervan*, Kindle Location, 7119.

²⁶ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

²⁷ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

the break here with the expected or conventional shows Yahweh's free involvement in the event.²⁸

When David arrives he displays all the attributes of divine favor. He is "ruddy" and attractive, handsome to the eye and of good experience.²⁹ In spite of this fact, however, Samuel is warned not to trust in appearance, "since it is not as man sees that God sees (1 Sam: 7)." Despite Eliab's appearance and stature, which are impressive, he is not Yahweh's choice.³⁰

Some scholars have discerned in this a veiled attack on the theme of Saul's great height, as it appears in (9:2).³¹ Eliab is something of a new Saul, so in his rejection Saul is denounced in effigy. The story of David's election forms a divine pivot with that of Saul's rejection. The book's preceding material together with David's selection produces a prophetically oriented transmission of the history of David's rise to power.³²

As it relates to the literary context, it is necessary to examine the words reject and anoint in relation to the passage. Reject in this context can be represented as I have not chosen.³³ The counterpart in English equates to overlook, disdain, disregard, cast away, deny, consider worthless, not want, recant, often approximate the contextual meaning in 1 Samuel.³⁴ An assumption can be made that the rich spectrum of usages one can deduce

²⁸ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

²⁹ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

³⁰ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

³¹ McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

³² McCarter, *First Samuel*, 273.

³³ Ernst Jenni and Claus Hendrickson, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Westminster Press, 2007), 652.

³⁴ Jenni and Hendrickson, *Theological Lexicon*, 652.

the basic meaning is to have nothing to do with, the reasons for this conclusion may be stated or left unsaid.³⁵

When Samuel sees Jesse's son Eliab, Yahweh effectively says of him – I do not want him. God uses slightly different language of the other brothers. He says effectively, these too I have not chosen.³⁶ For one can only be rejected only if one has been previously chosen, such is the case with Saul in 1 Samuel. In Saul's case, his rejection is based on Saul's rejection of the word of the Lord. Yahweh's rejection is not capricious, unlike election it is not ultimately grounded in Yahweh's freedom.³⁷

It is a reaction to the failure of the King. This failure however, does not constitute military or political success. On the contrary, 1 Samuel reports Saul's considerable military success. Rather, the rejection of Saul is based on specific acts of disobedience. The structure of 1 Samuel until David's choice as king has the following pattern. The book's name derives from the individual whom God used to establish kingship in Israel.³⁸ Last of the judges, Samuel's name literally means name of God – EL.³⁹ The name means strength and power.⁴⁰ Samuel had the pivotal role of leading the people through the transition of the judges to the establishment of the monarchy. These books did not always

³⁵ Jenni and Hendrickson, *Theological Lexicon*, 653.

³⁶ Jenni and Hendrickson, *Theological Lexicon*, 653.

³⁷ Jenni and Hendrickson, *Theological Lexicon*, 656.

³⁸ Walter A. Elpall and Phillip W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 2001), 1157.

³⁹ Elpall and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1157.

⁴⁰ Elpall and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1158.

bear his name. The Septuagint or the Greek revision of the Old Testament denoted these stories in the Books of Kings.⁴¹

Although Samuel is prominent in the first part of the books, and the books bear his name in our English version it is obvious he did not write the books in their entirety. Samuel's death is recorded in First Samuel the twenty-fifth chapter. This is prior to David's ascension to the throne in place of Saul. The binding relationship between First Samuel pertains to the relationship between kingship and the covenant.⁴² Kingship as requested by the people was a denial of the covenant. Kingship as practices by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal ideals established by God.

On the other hand, kingship practiced by David was an imperfect but true representation of the covenantal king.⁴³ It has often been pointed out that there is ambivalence in the establishment of kingship in Israel (1 Sam. 8-12). Because it seems to suggest in some places, kingship is improper in Israel, while in other places, it seems to suggest kingship was God's will for Israel. Resolution of this tension is provided in First Samuel the twelfth chapter, when Samuel inaugurates Saul as the first king of Israel.

David was anointed king prefigures Christ.⁴⁴ The text is used to reflect the existential and contextual situation of African American at-risk youth. Christ deliberately sided with the poor and outcast of society. He ushered in a true salvific paradigm, which provided wholeness in the spiritual and social order. The stark similarity between David's family dysfunction and contemporary African American youth are striking. The

⁴¹ Elpall and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1158.

⁴² Elpall and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1158.

⁴³ Elpall and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1158.

⁴⁴ T. Clark, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Publishing, 2005), 260.

term often used to label the youth is at risk youth. In a real sense, David was an at risk youth. He literally was forgotten and given little value by Jesse. Michael Joseph Brown attest, African American interpretation looks for the potential liberator aspect of the texts.⁴⁵ This supports his claim that all readings are interested.⁴⁶ The corollary is that all readers insert their ethnic, economic, and social locations into reading scripture.

James Evans asserts that liberation and revelation form the twin partners to African American ontology.⁴⁷ He proposes that revelation is God's enlightening the mind to the current social setting, and liberation as the quest to eliminate all forms of oppression and marginalization. Pairing these concepts lead to the ontological position of marginalized communities.

Conclusion

Based on these long established norms of African American hermeneutics, it is suggested that David's family dysfunction is comparable to that of contemporary African American youth. David was outside the confines of his family. His father figuratively and literally seemed to banish him from important events in the family history. David appeared to be an afterthought to Jesse. He did not appear attentive of David's needs. In fact, based on the biblical narrative, David had the characteristics of an at-risk youth. As earlier text revealed he was the eighth son or considered as an outsider. David's seven brothers were recognized and valued in a greater capacity by Jesse. His father apparently

⁴⁵ Michael Joseph Brown, *Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical Scholarship* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2004), 3.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Blackening of the Bible*, 3.

⁴⁷ James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), Kindle Location, 872.

did not see the inherent value and worth David possessed. However, God sees the inherent potential and possibilities of all humans.

Jesse's behavior toward David seems strangely similar to many African American father's behavior toward at-risk youth. That is to say, many African American fathers choose the children they will establish relationships with, and in a real sense, neglect others or do not commit to a continuous relationship with some of their children. The story of David reminds us that God often elevate those whom society and family overlook or neglect.

David serves as role model for an at-risk mentoring model. At-risk youth are often isolated from the societal and familial gatherings. David's father did not seem to think twice about excluding David from the sacrificial ceremony and dinner. He did not send an older son to bring David to the festivities. David was excluded from the affair. He appeared to be excluded from family gatherings, someone lacking love and worth. At-risk youth find themselves in a similar situation. These young people are often overlooked by their families and the dominant society.

New Testament Scripture

The New Testament scripture reference is First Timothy 4:6-12 and it states:

If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

First Timothy depicts the Apostle Paul mentoring relationship to a beloved and trusted young protégé. In the backdrop of the narrative, leadership and mentoring occurs. This text has specific relevance for at-risk African American youth. They are young and need a mentoring structure to empower them for future leadership roles. My project addresses the need to mentor poor and educationally disadvantaged African American youth residing near First Baptist Church Raleigh, North Carolina.

My project aims to establish a biblically based mentoring program to empower at-risk youth. The church should play an active role in the community. This results in sustained outreach to minister or serve the needs of this demographic. The mentoring program seeks to empower at-risk youth primarily with increased self-esteem, and self-worth. This can be accomplished by the word of God as the framework and foundation of the mentoring program. Coupled with introducing Africentric and Black theology educational curriculum. This introduction will show the presence and contributions of Africans to Christianity. The goal is to bolster new insights into their cultural heritage and bolster their self-esteem. Timothy serves as an example because he was the product of two distinct cultures. Yet, I assert that Paul's mentoring initiative prepared him for church leadership. I contend this approach can extend to at-risk youth.

Exegesis

Many scholars believe that the pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) have a common origin. Timothy is mentioned as an associate or helper of Paul in the four letters (1 Thess. 3:2, 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10, 2 Cor. 1:19, and Phil. 2:19). Timothy also is mentioned

in the following chapters of Acts: (16:1-3, 17: 14-15, 18:5, 19:2, and 20:4).⁴⁸ These scripture provide a framework in helping to develop a mentee role as assumed by Timothy.

Most scholars believe the letter was written around 90 – 110 C.E.⁴⁹ Other scholars believe the letters were part of a third generation correspondence. They also attributed authorship by pseudoeigraphical means. It was customary for disciples of famous characters to create documents on their behalf. It was viewed differently than today, and considered an honor to develop writing on behalf of the famous person. The scholastic consensus questions the validity of the biographical information whether it should be viewed as factual or legendary. If the information they provided is accepted, then it would indicate Paul left Timothy in charge of the Ephesus church while he was in Macedonia.

Most scholars believe the pastoral letters have a common origin, probably written by the same person.⁵⁰ And, that when considered collectively, they must be regarded as pseudoeigraphical. The following points are offered to support this contention. The language and style are not typical of Paul's letters. For example, First Timothy lacks a thanksgiving and a formal closing, and the vocabulary of the letter is strikingly different from other letters ascribed to Paul.⁵¹ Secondly, certain theological ideas are different. For example, salvation is linked to the epiphany (or appearance of Christ), First Timothy

⁴⁸ James Luther Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus: Interpretation a Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), Kindle Location, 4.

⁴⁹ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 14.

⁵⁰ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 14.

⁵¹ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 17.

3:16, in these writings the cross and resurrection are virtually ignored.⁵² Likewise, words like “righteousness” and “faith” are used in a way that accentuates the human dynamic of right behavior or correct belief, rather than the activity of God. Thirdly, the description of church and the manner of dealing with false teaching is not characteristic of Paul. The exact nature of this teaching is ambiguous, but it seems to have certain points in common with Gnosticism, a religious system that posed a serious challenge to Christianity in the second century.⁵³

For instance, the manner of dealing with false teachings is not characteristic of Paul. Rather than seeking to refute the objectionable ideas with sound reasoning, the authors of the letter seem resigned to call upon church leaders to exercise their authority and promote what they regard as sound doctrine and forbid questionable teachings.⁵⁴ First Timothy describes a situation where Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia, and is writing back to Timothy who is now in charge of the Ephesus church.

Some scholars regard First Timothy and the pastoral letters as authentic.⁵⁵ They argue linguistic differences have little validity as it relates to confirming another author. Paul is presumed to have employed a literary or artistic assistant for the task of putting his thoughts into words. Anomalies in Paul’s writing might be explained by presumption that both the style and substance of Paul’s letters would be different in personal correspondence than in letters written to congregations.⁵⁶

⁵² Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 17.

⁵³ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 18.

⁵⁴ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 18.

⁵⁵ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 20.

⁵⁶ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 20.

According to Bart Ehrman, First and Second Timothy, and Titus are clearly non-Pauline writings.⁵⁷ He further claims these writings are forgeries attributed to Paul. Ehrman posits the letters should be accepted as doctrine, and pseudo authors used Paul's name to validate the book's authenticity. Further, Ehrman asserts that each epistle addresses a slightly different situation.⁵⁸ He further elaborates and says although the situations are different; the underlying issues are the same. Ehrman maintains the doctrinal errors decomposes into two categories: 1) false teachings spawning problems for the church, 2) the internal organization of the community and its effect on church leaders.⁵⁹ Paul urges Timothy and the other leaders to refute heresies and to run a tight ship. He demanded church leaders to keep the congregation in line with sound doctrine and teachings. This would silence teachings and ideas, which conflicted with established doctrine, which he has endorsed.⁶⁰

Scholars, who favor authenticity, also maintain that current knowledge of first century Christianity is insufficient for forming strong opinions regarding the development of church polity or for determining when and where certain orthodox ideas might have flourished. Likewise, they point out there are significant gaps in all reconstructions of Paul's biography.⁶¹ The apostle could have left Timothy in-charge of Ephesus at some time not specifically mentioned in the New Testament. A popular suggestion amongst scholars favoring authenticity has been that Paul was not executed in 62 – 64 C.E. (as is

⁵⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2008), 194.

⁵⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 194.

⁵⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 194.

⁶⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 194.

⁶¹ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 18.

usually thought) but was released from prison to have a second career, as a missionary, during which time he wrote the pastoral letters.⁶²

The fundamental message of Timothy is to pass on the gospel message of the ancestors. First Timothy is an example of faith legacy passed to the next generation. Timothy received the faith from his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice. As a consequent, he (the third generation) stands poised to pass it along to the current generation.⁶³

The structure of First Timothy begins with a salutation or greeting, chapter 1:1-2. Timothy's commission to guard against heresy follows the salutation (1:3-20). The book provides details as it relates to instruction for church order, (2:1-6), the roles defined for men and women (2:1-15), leaders qualities (3:1-13), purpose of the letter (3:14-16), warnings about heresies in the last days (4:1-10) and instructions to be passed on (4:11-6:2).⁶⁴

One of the major themes of First Timothy centers on the appointment of church officers. Leaders appointed are bishops, deacons, and widows appear to occupy the most prominent leadership roles. Qualifications for the first two positions emphasize moral responsibility and social respectability. The third ministry mentioned widows, which may have represented an outgrowth of the charitable providing support for poor widows. First Timothy is also concerned with the correction of false teaching within the church.

⁶² Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 23.

⁶³ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 23.

⁶⁴ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 24.

These letters were written under conditions when the survival of the Christian community seemed extremely doubtful or realistic.⁶⁵ Many hostile forces were challenging the contextual existence of this fragile community. Paul committed to pass along the good news of Jesus Christ to subsequent generations. The churches were small groups of believers meeting in people homes, not established institutions with sound financial prestige.⁶⁶

The scenario or narrative presumes that Paul and Timothy visited Ephesus on the way to Macedonia. During this trip, Paul decided to leave Timothy behind to create consistency of biblical teaching as it related to the false teachers. Most of the letter includes instruction for Christian living and social interaction. The letter instructs Christians on the method of prayer, and appropriate behavior toward leaders, and widows.⁶⁷ The letter further details what Christians should avoid. Namely, Christians should avoid pointless ascetic lifestyles, materialism, and heresies, which distort the Gospel truths.⁶⁸ The exact nature of these heresies is not stated. We have clues from the writings. Ehrman argues that some members of the congregations have become engrossed with myths and pointless genealogies.⁶⁹ He suggests this would strike a familiar cord with modern biblical interpreters familiar with the multiple strands of Gnosticism.⁷⁰ The Gnostic Christians developed elaborate genealogies claiming to trace the origin of divine

⁶⁵ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 47.

⁶⁶ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 47.

⁶⁷ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

⁶⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

⁶⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

⁷⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

beings. Supposedly, they were able to reconstruct the beginning of these beings.⁷¹ Most of these groups were heavily ascetic, and practiced disciplined methods to bring their bodies under control. The overall intent was to escape the physical world and interact with the spiritual plane. As a result, they attempted to punish their bodies to avoid bodily enslavement.

Similarly, Gnostic Christians insisted on bland and uninteresting diets. They retreated from all forms of sexual activity and forbade marriage. The author of First Timothy lambastes false teachers for forbidding marriage and demanding abstinence from certain food.⁷² Timothy verbally attacks or critiques these false teachings, challenging the congregation to reject the teachings and avoid profane chatter and reiterates that the congregation adheres to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

David Barr approaches First Timothy and the pastoral letters from the viewpoint of the emerging institution. Like Ehrman and other scholars, he contends the writings are non-Pauline. He asserts that portions of First and Second Timothy read like fragments stitched together to form a unified whole.⁷³ He admits that his hypothesis is a guess, but aligns with the majority of New Testament scholarly findings. He further elaborates that non-Pauline authorship does not diminish the importance of the letters to development of the early church. Whoever wrote the letter makes little difference as the letters are powerful and useful in their own right.⁷⁴ Barr arrives at non-Pauline authorship primarily on writing style differences. According to Barr, substantial style differences call attention

⁷¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

⁷² Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195.

⁷³ David L. Barr, *The New Testament Story: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Centage Press, 2009), 194.

⁷⁴ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 194.

to basic dissimilarity between Paul and the writer of First Timothy. He contends that Paul's writing style utilize more passion, argumentation, and appears more engaging. Contrast the style of the writer of First Timothy, which is cool, dictatorial, and above the fray.⁷⁵ Consequently, some of the theological ideas found in the letter are not consistent with Paul's letters. For instance, some of the altered vocabulary appears to be evolved resulting from changed ideas. Specifically righteousness no longer means justification, and faith no longer means faith, but a position to be held.⁷⁶ Christ is interpreted in terms of epiphany – a common Greek or Hellenistic term.⁷⁷ This deviates from Paul's earlier message of Christ aligned to the cross.

There is universal agreement that the historical situation has changed. What is debated is whether the change would cause such a departure of Paul's normal use of language. The question is: has it changed so much, that it reflects the next generation after Paul?⁷⁸ The acceptance of the Gentiles into the church seemed to be resolved completely. Also, the struggle and controversy surrounding keeping the law is absent from the dialogue. The argument with opponents has taking different shape. Before, Paul had internal opponents within his assembly, now there seems to be a clear demarcation point between the faithful insiders and the heretical outsiders.⁷⁹

Paul was correct to suspect, as we know now, that things were about to get worse. It is amazing and miraculous that the church survived this early period of persecution.

⁷⁵ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

⁷⁶ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

⁷⁷ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

⁷⁸ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

⁷⁹ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

Paul and Timothy's relationship had been forged on Paul's earliest ministry trips. It began to crystallize on Paul's missionary trip to Lystra. In antiquity, Lystra was a colony between Antioch and Derbe in the district of Laconia.⁸⁰ Paul defines the characteristic of church leadership. Also, there is a theological shift in the narrative – away from the imminent return of Jesus Christ to the establishment of church polity and administration. Timothy did not have the religious pedigree of Paul or the Apostles, but he displayed loyalty and a zeal for the word of God. Acts 16:1-3, presents Timothy as the child of a gentile Father and a Jewish mother. In a real sense he was an outsider in the faith, which derived from Judaism. According to scripture his mother lived in Lystria and was a believer of the way, while his Greek father was an unbeliever. Despite his diverse pedigree, Timothy became a consequential leader.

However, as Barr puts it, "the greatest change is the organization of the church."⁸¹ Timothy addresses issues affecting an established church. This includes a paid clergy and an ecclesiastical hierarchy. This seems out of place in Paul's time. Specifically, the command "that a bishop, "be not a recent convert." In all actuality, everyone was a recent convert during Paul's generation.

Another topic removed from Paul's writing is eschatological language. Paul other letters referenced end time themes and language. Where is the sense of waiting for the near end?⁸² Where is the sense of freedom? Where the sense of suffering that is redeeming the world? Where is the body of Christ? What is the community stance? Is it

⁸⁰ Mays, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Kindle Location, 50.

⁸¹ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 198.

⁸² Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 199.

all-inclusive, considering slaves and free believers as brothers and sisters? Where is the Paul who lived only in Christ?⁸³

It seems that attention to the present has surpassed eternal concerns of the future kingdom. Has the desire to fit into the outside culture eroded his freedom found in Christ Jesus? It seems we now have a more watered down version of Paul. Has the great apostle been systematically tamed for Western consumption? The question is raised because the once champion of cosmic conflicts who eagerly await the end of the world, has reordered his priorities to church organization.

Clarice Martin offers helpful insight to the shift from end times to transmitting the faith. She peers into the multicultural, pluralistic, Mediterranean world. Martin maintains that Christians were reacting to church dynamics, which mirrored the bustling Mediterranean world.⁸⁴ The suggestion is the church situated in the center of this world, had to deal with the negative effects within its corridors.

The extended evaluation of First Timothy from liberation or social justice points of view is furnished by Brian K. Blount in *“True to Our Native Land.”* This work compiles African American scholars’ commentaries of the New Testament. More specifically the work provides focus on three areas: church and society, false teachings, and young leaders. The goal is to understand the freedom found in Jesus Christ within these contexts.

Martin appears to suggest that the writers of First Timothy acquiesced to appease imperial powers. She contends that, “1 Timothy has in view a particular motive for

⁸³ Barr, *The New Testament Story*, 199.

⁸⁴ Brian K. Blount, *True to Our Native Land* (Minneapolis, MN: Judson Press, 2007), 410.

accommodating worldly powers.”⁸⁵ This is an attempt to call out the syncretism steadily moving ever so close to the powers of the empire. After all, at this point in history the church and state (Roman Empire) are no longer at odds. The church has begun to portray the Roman political powers rather positively.⁸⁶

The writer’s implicit prayer is that the work of the Christian mission not be inhibited by the imperial powers. Some scholars attribute this view to an evolving conservative theological stance. In other words, it mirrors a middle class bourgeois rendition of scripture in order to parlay acceptance with the ruling elites. This would allow the church to avoid conflict with the socio-political ecosystem. Other scholars argue this stance was more of a survival mechanism. Clarifying this reasoning more fully, these scholars maintain that cultural assimilation reflects the church within its specific context. Meaning the seemingly syncretism resulted from the delayed eschatological end times Paul preached earlier. When Jesus imminent return did not occur, the church instituted a coping mechanism.

The ideals and methods emphasized in First Timothy stand in stark contrast to the Pauline idea of existence.⁸⁷ Paul proposed an ethic that indicated the end of the dominant order soon, and the establishment of the Lord’s Kingdom.⁸⁸ Paul established a revolutionary countercultural ethos within the assemblies.⁸⁹ The writer of the pastoral letters favors a peaceful coexistence. The takeaway is that Christianity no longer looked

⁸⁵ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 420.

⁸⁶ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 420.

⁸⁷ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 421.

⁸⁸ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 421.

⁸⁹ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 421.

upon itself as the community of the new ages that promised to breakdown social barriers.⁹⁰ Instead, the church had become complicit with the world and society and had to adopt and perpetuate the general norms within its hallowed walls. Now shifting thought to false teaching. Which in many respects may be viewed as the partnering with society and neglecting the radical call of the gospel?

In focusing on false teaching Timothy was reacting to issues within the Ephesus Church. The author of First Timothy analogous to an investigative reporter skillfully compiles the list of false teachings circulating in the church. He lists the practice of verbal wrangling.⁹¹ In this context it means arguing noisily within the church. He critiques their idea of forbidding marriage as one of the false teachings prevalent at this time. For clarity, Paul had advised some members in earlier decades not to marry in response to the coming end time (1 Cor. 7; 8, 25-26).⁹² However, he clearly did not forbid marriage categorically. The practice of abstinence from certain foods is highlighted. In response to the self-discipline practice of abstaining from certain foods, the writer counters with the bounty and variety of foods God provides to secure the continuation of humankind.⁹³ God created food to be received with thanksgiving for it speaks of God's good gifts to humanity. The gifts of food and sex used within the boundaries of God's intent should be cherished, treasured, and appreciated. One by one these heresies were refuted. They were replaced with the truths of God's word. God

⁹⁰ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 421.

⁹¹ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 426.

⁹² Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 426.

⁹³ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 426.

provided marriage, and food to be another avenue for humanity to marvel at the vast magnitude of God's love.

That's why it was important for young leaders to know the Gospel truths. In a church and society that valued elders, young leaders within the assemblies may have experienced some intimidation.⁹⁴ Paul reiterated to Timothy that his gift of prophecy was divinely incurred by the laying on of hands. He said this to reinforce confidence in the young leader. So that Timothy would not second-guess his authority, which is the death crucible for any leader, but use his knowledge to confidently refute false teachings in the church.

There are several applications that can be inserted into every day Christian living for mentoring between the church and at risk youth in the community. Paul and Timothy mentoring relationship is a model for the twenty first century church. There are no limitations in the sense that the mentoring profile would be African American at-risk youth. The model would extend to at risk girls and boys – limited initially to the African American churches, but the model is applicable to any at-risk group. The mentoring would focus on life skills and strategies from a biblical perspective.

Conclusion

Like Timothy's challenge to refute false teachings during his generation, there is a need for leaders of the church to refute the false teachings of our time. Specifically, refute the false teachings of low self-esteem, materialism, nihilism, and cultural irrelevance. Replace these with the liberating power found only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The text affords ample theological insight to develop coping strategies, which requires

⁹⁴ Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 426.

commitment from seasoned Christian leaders, with a heart for hands on ministry.

Mentoring is an action activity, meaning that it requires concrete action. It removes rhetoric and replaces it with actionable tasks.

First Timothy presents an inclusive gospel that embraces the whole of humanity, which is good news for at-risk youth. These at-risk youth straddle a cultural and societal double consciousness. Like Timothy, they are not fully accepted. Timothy is the product of a multicultural, pluralistic society. His mother was Jewish and Father Greek. So Timothy had to navigate the boundaries of two great cultural heritages. Never quite fitting into either one. At-risk African American youth encounter a similar situation. A cultural collage stitched together by African and American values, never quite accepted or acclimating to either one. Such is the story of Timothy.

Yet in spite of a potential clash of cultures, Timothy assumes the mantel of leadership. Let's not forget, that Timothy was groomed and nurtured for leadership. The great Apostle Paul invested time and energy to develop a mentoring relationship. Timothy and David could both be considered at-risk youth. These scriptures provides the basis for the mentoring model. Both leaders were outside the mainstream of their respective societies. These scriptures provide the biblical foundation for the at-risk youth mentoring program.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

First Baptist church began in 1812, when twenty-three individuals met in the state house to form a gospel church known as the Raleigh Baptist church. The composition of these founding members was racially diverse. There were fourteen slaves of African descent and nine members of European descent. The church split in 1868 when two hundred former slaves asked permission to form their own church. First Baptist has been a lantern of social justice since the beginning. Going forward the words black and African American will be used synonymously.

The goal of this chapter is to trace the history of the black church with its blend of African and European amalgamation. This hybrid mixture yielded a prophetic church spawning black liberation theology. First Baptist supported social justice causes during reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights period. The purpose is to rekindle First Baptist Church prophetic and liberation origin to address the needs of at-risk youth from a historical perspective.

God has always sided with the poor throughout the beginning of time. The black church is a direct response of this belief. The black church selection of particular verses reinforces the biblical precedence to address issues affecting the poor, outcast, and at-risk groups represented in society. Scripture portray God's alignment with the poor and at-risk youth within a particular society. Its initial focus is within the Jewish societal

structure, but the universal application applies to all people and nations. The implication is that God's love extends to all regardless of class, race, sociological, or economic status.

Therefore, it is imperative that the discussion begins with the origin of the black church. The black church did not separate the sacred from the secular realm. This linkage began during the antebellum period, lasting through reconstruction, into the modern period. From this backdrop, the African American community maintained the tradition of caring for its children.

Due to the consumer market factors slavery introduced, children were often sold and separated from their original families. Surrogate families were needed to groom and mentor these children.¹ In effect, this uprooting of families, was established when Africans were taken from their homeland. Disparate cultural and linguistic tribes were forced to come together out of necessity in order to survive in North America.² The dehumanization of slavery encouraged some slaves to escape, while others committed suicide. However, the vast majority acclimated to their new surroundings and tried to make sense of their being. Christianity taught by their slave masters helped to make some sense of their new situation. The slaves combined Christianity into an African worldview.

However, slaves rejected much of the false ideologies presented by preachers representing the plantations. These preachers were apologist for slavery championing the viewpoint that slavery rescued Africans from their sins. The corollary was that through

¹ E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America: The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York, NY: Schoken Books, 1972), 14.

² Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America*, 17.

slavery Christianity saved them from witchcraft and idolatry. The truth is west Africans had a sophisticated cultural past and religious belief system.³

According to Melville Hersk, it is important to recall the African cultural and religious contributions to combat racism in the church.⁴ This is important because it can be used to refute the notion that Africans were not developed enough to withstand contact with superior European culture. Which formed the basis for dehumanization and eventually slave exploitation. Insinuating that Africans were inferior people being rescued and redeemed via slavery.

The reality is that Africans were enslaved from many different tribes and cultural settings. They spoke different languages and had various religious viewpoints. For these reasons, African Americans rejected the false narrative that slavery rescued them from their sins.⁵ Acceptance of this viewpoint would provide legitimacy of an abhorrent system based primarily on economic gain. Slavery was not based upon evangelical outreach, but had more to do with acquiring more capital and resources. So it was a gross distortion to say that slavery was a benevolent institution predicated on saving lost souls.

Instead, it was an economic system based on human exploitation. Leading to the further acquisition of wealth. It can be seen in the religious instruction given to the slaves. The plantation preachers were fixated with the following scriptures, “servants obey your masters, and do not steal for this is wrong.”⁶ The plantation preachers argued that not doing such things was sinning against the Holy Ghost, and base ingratitude to

³ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48.

⁴ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 48.

⁵ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 65.

⁶ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 66.

your masters who clothe and feed you. These instructions were provided to keep the system secure, and to keep the material gains of the slave masters safe.

These messages did not fit well with the slaves. It was not until the revival period that African Americans really began to adopt Christianity. The slaves responded to the white preacher's emphasis on piety and the conversion experience.⁷ The slaves were especially intrigued by the conversion experience. It had similarities with African traditional religions tenants of conversions and controlled by the spirit.⁸ Christianity also reinforced that God viewed Africans as equal members of the human family.

In this sense, Christianity served as an anchor helping the slaves cling to the last vestiges of their humanity. The slaves embraced the exodus narrative. They transposed their experience to that of the Israelites awaiting God's intervention on their behalf to liberate them from oppression and slavery. The slaves earnestly awaited a liberator to lead them to the promised land of the North. Just as God did in the Exodus story. Slaves interpreted the Bible in light of their daily experience. Thus establishing the long tradition of the black church that anyone with the aid of the Holy Spirit can interpret the Bible.

In essence, the Holy Spirit became an equalizer, leveling the spiritual status of slave and master. This egalitarian understanding was articulated and clarified by black preachers. This notion has been incorporated into the preaching, singing, and worship of the early and present black church. Christianity was used by the black church as a protective mechanism. It became a galvanizing force propelling slaves to escape and seek freedom in the North.

⁷ Carter G. Woodson, *A History of the African American Church* (New York, NY: Diaspora Press, 2013), 85.

⁸ Woodson, *A History of the African American Church*, 85.

James Cone suggests the existence of the black church results from slavery, legal Jim Crow, and the survival of African Americans.⁹ Cone claims the liberation aspects have always been linked to the black church. Insisting the church was complicit in rejecting the racist ideology of the white church in collusion with slave owners. In other words, the black church advocates for the rights of the community. There is no separation from theology and practice. The historical condition of the African American community has been coupled with daily experiences. This implies the theology of the black church is not systematically developed in the academy but on the streets.¹⁰ The black church linked its existence to serve the poor and marginalized.

Cone argues that Jesus is the object of salvation and liberation.¹¹ This implies that salvation and liberation are the works of God. Cone defines liberation as a project where African Americans realize their struggle for freedom is a divine right from God.¹² Jesus the liberator suggests that He will be on the side of the oppressed and will be a staunch advocate. Therefore, the early black church unapologetically accepted the gospel due to this concept. The black church related the gospel to real life experiences. This relationship was pragmatic and of necessity.

Michael Brown calls this a corrective interpretation.¹³ The Bible was used to reinforce black humanity and inherent worth. The exodus narrative and the crucifixion of

⁹ James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two: 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 87.

¹⁰ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 87.

¹¹ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 90.

¹² Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 91.

¹³ Michael Joseph Brown, *Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical Scholarship* (New York, NY: Trinity Press, 2004), 54.

Jesus revealed God's partiality for justice. This corrected the dominant reading that God approved slavery and subjection of African people. The Bible consistently refers to justice as an attribute of God. Also reiterates the brotherhood of humanity. Out of this understanding of the bible, the Black church came into existence and serves as a corrective for the power structure.

Dale Andrews view the black church as a refuge. He suggests that church practice developed via preaching and pastoral care provided protection for the community.¹⁴ The refuge metaphor began as reaction to the overt oppression the black community endured. The church became a safe space. This metaphor also articulates the nurturing, survival, and growth of the black community through the Christian faith.¹⁵ The church created a safe space for the community. The community developed leaders, talent, and a communal response to systemic discrimination.

The church provided the spiritual, emotional, and sociological needs for a disenfranchised people.¹⁶ Black preachers held a dominant role in the church. Often they were the most educated and influential members of the community. This refuge image has often been criticized as escapism. Others, however, view this metaphor as a survival strategy necessary for the community.

The communal survival aspect of the gospel began with the invisible church. Africans would go to the hush harbors of southern towns to worship communally without the watchful eyes of overseers or masters. Black preachers were originally prohibited

¹⁴ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 34.

¹⁵ Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, 35.

¹⁶ Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, 35.

from preaching the gospel to slaves.¹⁷ Therefore, in order to maintain a communal atmosphere, slaves would meet in the early mornings to sing, worship, and preach in a conducive manner that was consistent with their context.

When owners finally allowed black preachers to conduct services formally it was under the supervision of white people and was limited to local plantations. The duties included conducting funerals, and sanctifying marriage for slaves.¹⁸ The slaves who had the best opportunity to become Christians were household servants, artisans, and urban slaves.¹⁹ These slaves grew up under the eyes and in the families of owners, they became more attached to them, were identified in their households and accompanied them to church.²⁰ Perhaps this was because many of these slaves had unique skills that were beneficial to the masters.

Antebellum Period

As mentioned previously, the Black Church began as resistance to their experience with slavery. It was a reaction or response to common group suffering. The slaves starting point was their common human experience. Biblical imagery became a means for Africans to make sense of their current reality. In other words, they began with the horrors of their experience and interpreted those horrors through the lens of the biblical text.

¹⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 135.

¹⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 136.

¹⁹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 149.

²⁰ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 149.

This was simultaneously courageous and risky business refusing the distorted watered down version of Christianity provided by the slave owners. Slave owners offered a docile version of Christianity intended to maintain the status quo. The goal was to maintain the power structures by keeping the slave ecosystem intact. This version of Christianity attempted to convince the slaves of their inferiority and justify the slave infrastructure. Overwhelmingly this perverted version of the gospel did not gain traction with the majority of the slaves.

The slaves refuted this false, flawed version of Christianity. Instead they formed the invisible church in the hush harbors and swamps of the south. This in itself was quite an achievement. Because, the slaves were illiterate and uneducated, and lacked the ability to utilize exegetical techniques. They used the only interpretive tool available, their historical location.

They relied on orally transmitted biblical stories. More specifically the slaves used the Exodus stories featuring Moses the promised liberator. The slaves identified strongly with the oppressed Hebrews. Like the Hebrew they were disenfranchised and dehumanized. Both clung to remnants of their cultural identities to maintain a semblance of sanity. Based on their understanding of the biblical stories, slaves integrated their West African cultural orientation with Christianity.

In this context, the Black preacher role became pivotal. A carryover from their West African Traditional Religion and griots. The religious leader becomes the central figure and voice of the community. Within the community, Black preachers and congregations are free to express themselves. The preacher role was central for the congregation and the worship experience. As Dale Andrews reminds us, Black preaching

creates a dialogue between the preacher and the congregation.²¹ The call and response, shout, and testimony became the norms of the worship experience. These elements of worship remain intact today for many African American churches. In a sense, the whole church becomes involved in the worship service.

The participatory nature of the service attracts the entire congregation and thus, becomes a communal experience. This collective activity remains a vibrant part of the Black Church experience. It continues as this shared form of worship depicts a celebration of scripture within the daily lives of the community. This allows for group bonding and unity during the worship service.²² A familiar feature of the Black Church is the testimony. Where members give thanks to God for each day, borrowing on the biblical and African concept of each day's renewal. This practice continues within African American churches. Black folks understood the precarious nature of life under slavery and systemic discrimination.

The goal of this section is to highlight significant events describing and tracing the time line of the modern African American church. The factors which shaped the development of the early black church. The relationship of "free negroes" and whites, and the post – civil right era church will be evaluated. Part of this analysis will examine the dynamics involved in the period and examine external and internal forces contributing to the development of the African American church.

Christianity and the emancipation of African Americans did not follow a linear trajectory. Nor did all agree on the best method of realizing freedom. Some slaves argued that slavery must be eradicated immediately. These folks linked the liberation aspects of

²¹ Andrews, *Practical Theology*, 22.

²² Andrews, *Practical Theology*, 23.

Christianity to their cause. They adopted Jesus message of freeing the captives and oppressed from their situation. Denmark Vesey channeled this viewpoint into an armed insurrection.²³ He led an armed rebellion against Charleston, South Carolina plantation owners in 1822. Nat Turner reportedly heard a call to arms in 1831. He killed 55 whites and eluded captivity until November 1832.²⁴ Vesey and Turner believed they were answering the call of the Holy Spirit to eliminate slavery in the United States. Their plan to achieve freedom accepted and advocated violence in order to obtain this reality.

Compare this viewpoint to some initial missionary outreach to the slave community. This outreach was not primarily concerned about emancipating Africans from chattel slavery. The primary emphasis was on converting slaves to Christianity and saving their souls. The Quakers however, were a noticeable exception. The Quakers accepted both free and enslaved Africans into their congregations. As early as the seventeenth century Quakers championed religious education for slaves as preparation for freedom.²⁵ This incremental approach led Quakers to free many of their slaves a practice which placed them squarely at odds with the plantation elites and slave owners.

In a similar fashion, there were some early Baptist and Methodist missionaries who liberated slaves on the grounds that slavery violated moral and theological laws. More importantly they understood that slavery violated the law of God, humanity, and nature. To be accurate, there were sharp divisions among the missionary ranks. One division emanated from those who did not want black clergy in leadership roles for white

²³ Milton C. Sernett, *African American Religious History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 11.

²⁴ Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 12.

²⁵ Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church*.

congregations. These sentiments eventually served as incentives for slaves and freedmen to establish their own religious institutions.

Two major African American denominations were established shortly after this period. Silver bluff the oldest black Baptist church was founded by George Lyle in 1784.²⁶ Lyle who was born a slave around 1750, fought in the revolutionary war alongside his owner George, and was granted freedom because of battlefield heroism. George also showed natural ministerial gifts, and this was instrumental in establishing Silver Bluff near Savannah around 1784.²⁷

This was an impressive feat considering the hostile climate that African American religious pioneers encountered. They still created their own institutions. The silver bluff church often met the needs of both free and slaves. Lyle would frequently minister to slaves and free alike. In this settings, black congregants had liberty to be expressive in their worship service. Often utilizing call and response, testimony, song, and dance to articulate their lived experience. Lyle would meet in plantations barns to provide an authentic service for the enslaved members of the community.

Similarly, what Lyle accomplished in the south, Richard Allen built African American churches in the north. The African Methodist Episcopal church was birthed because of racial bias. It was founded in 1814, by Richard Allen a formal slave from Delaware.²⁸ He and other blacks attended ST George Methodist church, where they were generally welcomed but segregated from white parishioners. As their numbers increased,

²⁶ Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church*, 30.

²⁷ Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church*, 30.

²⁸ Frank S. Meade and Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 222.

the church congregation built a gallery to separate worshippers based on race. Church leaders asked blacks to sit separately from the white membership. This arrangement generally worked, but as more blacks attended the church, white parishioners became paranoid. Absalom Jones who would later become Bishop of AME Zion church was physically removed by white trustees while kneeling in prayer.²⁹

As black worshipper's numbers increased, the church leadership became ever more conscious of race. Church leaders wanted blacks to worship separately from the white membership.³⁰ The turning point which propelled blacks to start their own church happened when Absalom Jones was physically removed by white trustees while kneeling in prayer.³¹ Shortly after this encounter, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones co-organized the Free African society. The society was born as protest and refusal to accept the second-class status blacks were expected to accept at white-dominated Methodist churches.

Allen, Absalom, and their supporters wanted to create an independent group to meet African-American needs. As a result of this controversy, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones established the AME church, and co-organized the Free African society. The society was birthed after disagreement and rejection of the second-class status blacks were subjected to at their white-dominated Methodist church. They designed the Free African Society as a mutual aid society to help support widows and orphans, as well as the sick or unemployed. Part of the society's mission supported the education of children,

²⁹ Meade and Hill, *Handbook of Denominations*, 223.

³⁰ Meade and Hill, *Handbook of Denominations*, 223.

³¹ Meade and Hill, *Handbook of Denominations*, 234.

or arranged apprenticeships if the children could not attend one of the free schools that were developed. The FAS provided social and economic guidance, and medical care.³²

Moreover, the FAS also helped new citizens establish a renewed sense of self-determination. While teaching economic education, they wanted to educate African Americans on how to save and build wealth. This became the model for banks in the African-American community. The society sought to improve the morals of its members by championing marriage. The society recorded marriages, births, and deaths for the people of its community. Working with the city of Philadelphia, the society secured a potter's field and burial ground for the community. While advocating positive virtues, the Free Aid Society condemned moral vices such as drunkenness and adultery.

Subsequently, the church began to evaluate its relationship to Africa. Growth in numbers, resources, and institutional stability, allowed the church to look beyond the United States.³³ The church became wary of only preaching the gospel on familiar soil. Daniel Coker of the AME church became the first Black missionary to Africa. In 1820, Coker left Baltimore and began missionary work in Liberia.³⁴ A year later Black Baptist founded Lott Cary in 1821.³⁵ Missionaries had initial difficulties adjusting to climate, cultural, and language differences. The successful missionaries started schools, translated the bible into the local languages, they made progress spreading the gospel in Africa. By

³² Meade and Hill, *Handbook of Denominations*, 237.

³³ Anthony B. Penn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 5.

³⁴ Penn, *The Black Church*, 6.

³⁵ Penn, *The Black Church*, 6.

1960 it was reported the black Pentecostals had over 2 million Africans members of their denomination.³⁶

Post-Civil War Period

While African Americans were creating their own institutions, former slaves in remote rural areas had less opportunity to attend church. So they met in secluded areas to worship based on memorized scriptures and emphasizing possession of the Holy Spirit. This possession of the Holy Spirit derived its prominence partly based on an inaccurate view of scripture and a mixture of African traditional religion. These slaves heard the rudiments of the gospel without the privilege of regularly attending church. The church dynamics in the south changed after the civil war. White and Black missionaries arrived to evangelize the former slaves. They often found the south infrastructure daunting. Some of the roads were damaged because of the war, and other roads were simply isolated.

The Baptist and Methodist missionaries viewed the civil war and reconstruction as divine signs that God was displeased with the institution of slavery.³⁷ The revivalist period during the nineteenth century really emphasized conversion. Missionaries were sent to remote rural areas to proclaim the gospel. The intense emphasis upon conversion was the primary characteristic of evangelical revivalism.³⁸ Their preaching asserted all men are sinners before God and needed salvation or restoration. The revivalist period opened the way for black converts to actively participate in the religious culture of the revamped south following the civil war. This period moved the Methodist church to

³⁶ Penn, *The Black Church*, 7.

³⁷ Penn, *The Black Church*, 3.

³⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 151.

formally condemn racial discrimination as being inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁹

The post-civil war period and during Jim Crow years, the black church understood religious freedom as an act of resistance. Hopkins says that religious freedom is important to the African American community because of the need to be viewed as a community of resistance.⁴⁰ This community of resistance challenged African Americans to remember the historical roots and experiences as a people. Specifically as it relates to the works of God, which propels groups forward toward equality. Hopkins likens this to the power of the religion working through human imagination empowering the community to stand up and dare to be different.⁴¹ This point of view played a key strategic role during Jim Crow and the civil rights era.

An example of this approach is the ministry of Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King vision of equality grounded in religious understanding of love. Non-violence and love had the power to mobilize people to courageously stand against police dogs, water hoses, and angry mobs.⁴² King blended resistance through the power of faith. Proving that faith provides the necessary strength to resist adversity, violence, unjust laws for the sake of communal survival.

King also deployed Gandhi's non-violent activism intersecting with Christian faith. Knowing that faith is powerful when it is interpreted through the experience of an oppressed people. It gives the community the courage necessary to confront morally

³⁹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 152.

⁴⁰ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Faith and Public Talk* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2007), 18.

⁴¹ Hopkins, *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 18.

⁴² Hopkins, *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 18.

corrupt authorities and systems. During this period of the civil rights movement the black church regained its progressive politics and social activism.

However, during the seventies, the church seems to regress into other worldliness as the rise of more radical and nationalistic orientations questioned the importance of the black church.⁴³ During this period the church became fixated on the afterlife, while neglecting the social justice concerns of the community. The black church became larger, and the ministers' richer, while concern for the less fortunate seemed secondary.

On college campuses, middle-class black students were embracing the cultural and intellectual philosophy of Black Nationalism.⁴⁴ In the urban centers things were changing as well, as urban blacks began to reject the notion of bowing down to a white Jesus.⁴⁵ Symbols and institutions were questioned by all Americans, and black Christians were not immune to this cultural questioning. This secularization, or focusing more on the physical world became the dominant thought during this era.

James Cone offered these words to temper secularization. It was the African side of black religion that enabled Africa Americans to see beyond exaggerations of the gospel of prosperity and to view Jesus as liberator. Remembering that it was this element in black religion that assisted African Americans to reconstruct the African past to survive in a society that devalued the minority group.⁴⁶ These words by James Cone attempted to bridge the divide between the church and community during this period. In the eighties, church attendance and membership began to increase once more. This

⁴³ Penn, *The Black Church*, 19.

⁴⁴ Penn, *The Black Church*, 19.

⁴⁵ Penn, *The Black Church*, 20.

⁴⁶ Penn, *The Black Church*, 48.

ushered in the mega church phenomenon. Like the storefront churches of the twentieth century, black megachurches attempted to grapple with the challenges of the black community in the twenty first century.⁴⁷ The black megachurch began in the eighties and continue till present day. Their membership is comprised of middle-class suburban blacks. Many of the membership are professional seeking a professional religious experience matching their upwardly mobile careers and professional attainments.

Some megachurches support a materialistic or prosperity gospel theological orientation. These churches are categorized by large impressive buildings with multiple campuses, including credit unions, family life centers, and other ministries tailoring to their membership. While there are some megachurches located in the inner city, most are situated in the suburbs. Therefore, leaving the inner cities and those least equipped to succeed on their own, at the mercy of gentrification and community disenfranchisement.

On the other hand, there are other megachurches that combine otherworldly and community outreach. It is not accurate to say that all mega churches are detached from the African American community. Some megachurches like Abyssinian Baptist in New York actively engages the community with community development projects as well as, political activism.⁴⁸ Therefore, some megachurches are continuing the historical call of the African American church to advocate for the overall community.

Conclusion

Similarly, it is along these lines that that I developed my project. The purpose of the project is to continue the black church tradition of community engagement. This

⁴⁷ Tamelyn N. Tucker-Worgs, *The Black Megachurch* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2011), 4.

⁴⁸ Tucker-Worgs, *The Black Megachurch*, 50.

engagement includes mentoring at-risk youth. First Baptist has the talent and resources to return to its prophetic roots and nourish our community. First Baptist was instrumental in the civil rights movement. We established voting drives. Invited leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. to preach in our pulpits.

We participated in sit-in and civil disobedience rallies for the cause of social justice. Now a new era of social justice is before us. It requires the church to speak for at-risk youth. Jesus mandates that we give voice to the marginalized but more than voice, a mentoring program, which requires active participation and true engagement between church and community.

First Baptist has been a historical role model for the city of Raleigh. The church has a distinguished past and has contributed heavily to the cause of social justice. Yet, we cannot stand on past accomplishments and laurels. Now is the time to continue this legacy in the twenty-first century. We need to make a difference in the lives of those left on the fringe of society. First Baptist needs to regain its original prophetic roots. Let's engage at-risk youth as the church embraced them in previous generations.

The fact is youth of today are bombarded by distraction unfamiliar to earlier generations. This generation consumes vast amount of information unprecedented by any previous generation. Yet, sad to say, these youth live in sub-standard living conditions immediately surrounding the church. The schools are inadequate, and many of these kids start life with major disadvantages.

Pre-civil right churches nourished and supported our children. We must remember our past and mentor these children. It is also a social justice issue because if we continue to let our children fail, they will more than likely become casualty of the criminal justice

system. If we fail to act, these children will potentially become the victims of gangs and drug dealers, which will negatively affect their future. It does not have to be this way.

First Baptist church has a divine opportunity to mentor and more importantly present the gospel of Jesus Christ to this twenty-first century generation.

What an opportunity to mentor and present the gospel. This mentoring program will introduce black theology, the history of the black church, and provide cyber space security. It is important that at-risk youth learn more about their cultural heritage. Let's face it, black history month does not adequately describe the history of the black church. If the church does not pass this information to the next generation – who will? Often times it seems that black youth are ashamed of slavery and its legacy.

Many do not know how the church fought to undo legal discrimination. The church should make sure young people know about the invisible church. Learn about the origin of the black Baptist and Methodist church. They should know the men and women who contributed to the freedoms they now enjoy.

Finally, we need to mentor our youth about the potential and peril of technology. While it is true that technology eliminates and flattens distance barriers. Social media allows us to interact with folks all over the world near real-time. Yet, we also need to educate our children about safe guarding their digital footprint. So that unscrupulous predators will not target them for evil intentions. Likewise, we need to make sure that our youth are aware of online marketing and protecting their privacy online.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

A-risk youth live in a world that appears to be created by the powerful and strong.

While there are no intelligent computing machines manipulating their sense of reality?

These children face an existential crisis, which threatens their futures and wellbeing.

These are the children without power. These children live in close proximity to affluent and middle class neighborhoods. Yet, they lack the resources of many children their age.

At-risk youth, attend subpar schools, live in inadequate housing, and displays signs of despair and skepticism. The church should play a bigger part in the lives of at-risk youth.

The goal of the project is to develop a mentoring program for at-risk youth to introduce them to Black theology and Africentrism. The mentoring program will be based on the gospel of Jesus Christ, with an Africentric lens. In order to say unequivocally, God shows partiality to the poor and marginalized. Specifically God cares about your situation and does not want you to lack the material and social structures missing from your community. Furthermore, the church implementation of a mentoring program will be a small step to assist in the works of God.

In the movie *Popping a Bitter Pill: The Matrix and Nausea*, Morpheus offers Neo an existential choice by saying:

Neo the world you've been living in is a lie. It is a fabrication, it is a virtual reality created by powerful computers. Here's where the choice occurs, if you take the red pill, your eyes and mind will be open to the real reality of the world you

inhabit. If you take the blue pill your perception of the world remain unchanged, and you won't remember meeting me or having this conversation.¹

Paradoxically, certain language used in the matrix movie applies to the lives of at-risk youth. Their environment has caused painful emotional feelings experienced in a depressed environment. This triggers anger and resentment because of unfair treatment. If only they had existential choices, a metaphorical blue or red pill to select. Perhaps this would equipment them to adequately choose either to remain in a state of slumber or to awake from their dream like state and exact change.

Although this red or blue pill is not an option for the at risk youth, theology can be used as the red pill that facilitates this awakening. Theology is by definition language, discourse, or talk about God.² This definition serves well for an at-risk youth mentoring program. The challenge is to find adequate wording and imagery to articulate God's position for disenfranchised at-risk youth. One opinion is that theology can be divided into two categories: conservative and liberal theology. Depending on the position one takes, it frames their religious orientation and language about God.

Nancy Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism* investigates this viewpoint. Dr. Murphy skillfully framed the intellectual positions of conservative and liberal theological thought and she revealed her thesis in each chapter, which provided clarity of thought for the reader. Further, she shied away from making absolute claims to truths. Instead, Dr. Murphy highlighted both conservative and liberal positions, and left it to the reader to decide which argument seemed closer to their position. This style of writing assists in clarifying the philosophical metaphor and applications of foundational

¹ William Irvin, *The Matrix and Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: Carus Publishing, 2002), 166-167.

² Daniel K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (London, UK: John Knox Press, 1996), 279.

knowledge as it is used for theological purposes related to the project. According to Dr. Murphy both conservatives and liberal views are predicated on how one interprets foundational knowledge.³

For instance, she proposes that Descartes, and John Locke are the founders of modern conservative theology. The notion of knowledge, built on unquestionable beliefs available to each individual. This viewpoint helps those in power maintain power or the blue pill in Matrix parlance. As society's values and standards are deemed absolute, changing the social norm is undesirable. It suggests that it would take a miracle outside the structure to liberate marginalized segments of society. This view tends to defend established belief systems and deter conversations challenging alternative points of view. Again, this theological point of view fit power brokers and empire builders' but it also stifles and snuffs out legitimate dissent by those who are disenfranchised and marginalized. Conservatives tend to have a strict inerrancy view of scripture. Most conservatives believe that God works outside the physical laws of nature and as supreme ruler has the ability to suspend these laws for divine purposes. They tend to focus on salvation and requirements for the afterlife while often neglecting social issues. While, granted, salvation is an important aspect of Christianity; conservatives often ignore the cause of the poor and down trodden. They avoid talking about these conditions and concentrate their efforts exclusively on sin and salvation.

On the other hand, liberal theology traced back to Fredrick Schleiermacher offers a different opinion.⁴ Murphy argues that Schleiermacher first made the move from

³ Nancy Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Post-Modern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 26.

⁴ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 37.

biblical inerrancy and proposed that religion is more attuned to experience.⁵ In other words, humanity has experiences with their souls, other humans, and their God. This argument seems more plausible for disenfranchised folks who seek liberation and equality. It is the red pill awakening their spirits and minds to unjust treatment. Their experiences with social inequality provide the passion to seek change. Liberals tend to place more weight on experience than scriptural inerrancy.

Another important point of departure is the way miracles are understood. Unlike conservative theologians, liberals believe that God acts through natural laws to perform miracles. Liberals rationale is that if God worked outside the very laws divinely created, this would make God appear impulsive. It should be noted that liberal theology allows for scriptural flexibility or the idea that God still speaks and more revelation for our time is forthcoming. Thus, change is always possible because humans do not have the final word and as finite beings are incapable of determining absolute truth. Our truths are often socially contrived, and God works actively within human history to foster and facilitate redemption.

At this point, a valid question, is why the prolonged discussion about conservative or liberal theology? What does it have to do with implementing a mentoring program for at-risk African American youth? These are fair and valid questions. Let me clarify. Conservative theologians tend to espouse the view that God changes human activity outside the natural laws and this thinking tends to reflect their stance to the social order as well. That changes comes through miraculous activities of God without human involvement. This position represents a restrictive attitude toward liberation,

⁵ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 39.

discrimination, and structural sins. It absolves the powerful from taking direct action to support the cause of the poor and weak.

A liberal theological orientation prioritizes an experience when encountering the living God. They also believe that God works through natural laws and systems to facilitate change. This is useful for the social order, as humans can initiate change via the existing social order in tandem with God's miraculous powers. It provides legitimacy for unjust systems to be altered. If the experience of the least of these are impaired, then liberal theology support challenging the norm. These beliefs and what they mean are important in theological discussions and practice.

This is especially pertinent, as my theological lens will be black theology and liberal theology undergirds it. Specifically the Africentric approach will be used as the adhesive to foster self-awareness, self-esteem, and awareness of African contributions to world history. The goal is to develop, unleash, and deploy creative powers that often lay dormant within at-risk youth. In order to successfully start the mentoring program requires positive reinforcement from the church augmented with enthusiastic mentors. The project will be designed to speak to God's liberating activities within humanity. Therefore, black theology is appropriate for this conversation.

In addition to black theologians, dialogue will occur with various theologians who provide analysis of picture language and black body denigration. It is relevant to fully understand the historical, systemic, and structural forces contributing to at-risk youth's condition. The intent is not to treat God as an object that can be categorized and defined, which would be considered idolatry and beyond the biblical belief system because God cannot be placed within any specific category. If we do so, then we risk creating our own

version of God. As a result of these limitations, the cultural and structural impediments will be analyzed that are affecting at-risk youth. Culture is being defined for this project as a metaphor of human development for at-risk youth. Culture is being compared to a petri dish, which is a small thin translucent covering that fosters and form the development of at-risk youth. This cultural encasement primarily transmits western values system and standards to at-risk youth.

At birth humans enter a world defined by established and defined relations.⁶ Humanity goes through life as interpreters of those values, assessing and evaluating how they relate to their overall being. When mainstream culture defines at-risk youth as gang bangers, thugs, and predators – this potentially becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Therefore, harmful cultural and environmental factors directly contribute to the predicament of at-risk youth.

William McClendon says that, “word pictures specify and produce future scenes.”⁷ This is called picture thinking and was developed by Ludwig Wittstein. What McClendon is really saying is that words and images internalized from culture eventually crystallizes and becomes reality. If the words and images projected into at-risk youth’s minds and spirits are left unchallenged and unfiltered, then yes, it can produce undesired results. The mentoring program will limit the effects of these images.

McClendon further suggests that word pictures have connections.⁸ When these connections grow and increase within an economically depressed community, their

⁶ Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 27.

⁷ James McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 75.

⁸ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 77.

message produce intentional outcomes. We see these connections manifested in at-risk youth's communities. These connections form the ecosystem and infrastructure of the community which produce inferior schools, dilapidated housing, and crumbling roads and streets. These factors send subtle as well as overt messages to at-risk youth. Mainly that you and your community are inadequate.

Moreover, the intrinsic message is that at-risk youth are undeserving of good schools and housing. These signals are at-odds with the innate God given values of self-love and self-worth. This contradictions help create internal duplicity. Theology is also and perhaps primarily a discipline of discernment.⁹ One has to be able to grasp and comprehend what God has to say about specific situations. Discernment is both a spiritual and intellectual activity. Meaning that discernment has to correlate, evaluate, and observe a particular situation in lieu of God's overall plan for humanity. The ultimate goal should be developing a positive good for every person, which leads to self-fulfillment.

When at-risk youth begin to think of themselves more positively. This will move their outlook in the positive direction and ultimately leads them to being open with other people. The ability to be open with others increases trust and commitment to upholding the humanity and spiritual life of others.¹⁰ When two spirits connect then individuals experience true fulfillment. If this spiritual approach is rejected and we become fixated exclusively with our created human nature and tribal affiliations, we become disconnected.

⁹ Helen T. Charry, *Inquiring After God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 53.

¹⁰ Ray S. Anderson, *Self-Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 2000), 40.

By defining culture in this manner it removes ambiguity and set the stage to engage in meaningful theological discussions. Culture as it applies to at-risk youth seeks to implement a mentoring program to reverse harmful developmental messages, and rejuvenate positive and empowering self-confidence. Since the mentoring program will consist of boys and girls, it is fitting to discuss not only black theology, which derives mainly from a male perspective, but, also include womanist thought for at-risk girls. Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ is embodied religion, meaning the concept of Cartesian mind body dualistic teaching is rejected. Where the mind or spirit is considered good and the body evil. This is important because separation of mind and body, has led many churches to prioritize the spiritual and devote less attention to social concerns. This is not the favored this position for the at-risk mentoring project.

James McClendon followed the Hebraic tradition of embracing the body and spirit equally as they're both part of God's good creation.¹¹ Embodied or comprehensive religion is concerned with the overall well-being of the person. It seeks to address the needs of people. With this in mind, any theological discussion in order to be comprehensive must speak to the needs of at-risk girls and womanist theology fits the requirement.

Womanist theology is applicable for this project because it brings oppressed African women's perspectives into the center of the theological debate. This is needed as far too often the debate has been controlled and choreographed from male perspectives. Womanist theology is a response to the cultural, gender, race, and class-based oppression, which confronts women of color. The goal of womanist theology is to remove these barriers thus allowing women equal access to God's creation. Womanist theology gives

¹¹ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 86.

African women the platform to participate in the theological process. Without women perspectives, the conversation remains incomplete and patriarchal slanted. European theologians sought to objectify and universalize all conversations pertaining to God. This was an attempt to obscure and nullify ethnic differences.¹² This practice along with deep-rooted patriarchal domination systems contributes to diminishing the self-value of African American women. This occurs when African American women are judged by European standards. These standards apply to beauty, body type, and femininity. African women curvaceous bodies and darker skin tones was often viewed as unattractive and physically grotesque.

At-risk girls are not immune to the dominant culture standards of beauty. So when a person sees the prevailing beauty standards, and it is diametrically opposed to their own, it may foster a form of self-hatred. As Mitchem contends African values rested on communal interrelatedness contrasting the European ideal of objectiveness.¹³ Mitchem insists that the African American community should reassess and reinterpret beauty and self-worth for its children. An example of putting this notion into practice is what toys we buy our children. Do we buy dolls that have features, hair texture, skin coloring that resemble and reflect African American girls? Or do we continue to purchase the traditional looking Barbie dolls? If parents and family members only buy dolls that are traditional looking, what message are we sending to our daughters?

Similarly, churches need to champion more women clergy and religious leaders. So that at-risk girls will have more role models to emulate if they choose to pursue religious education. More importantly, we need female exegetical insights into scripture.

¹² Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introduction to Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 42.

¹³ Mitchem, *Introduction to Womanist Theology*, 43.

Without it, our polity, teachings, and worship is one-dimensional. Humanity is composed of male and female, if we only subscribe to male – predominantly white male’s interpretation of scripture, interpretation is incomplete. Renita Weems says outlook has a lot to do with how one interprets the Bible. In other words, white males cannot accurately interpret scripture for African American women.¹⁴ Weems and Mitchem thoughts converge at this point.

African American women live in a society where whiteness exemplifies normality and blackness equates to limitations.¹⁵ These racial limitations if left unchallenged contribute to a permanent underclass. Womanist theology examines the classism and economic disparities challenging African American women. The goal is to remove these barriers and ensure more equity.

In addition, the lens of race used by colonizers defined physical beauty. The early colonizers depicted African women bodies as abnormal and base.¹⁶ This may cause self-hatred, hopelessness, and self-loathing. Womanist theology seeks to deconstruct this worldview. It seeks to affirm and accept the legitimacy of African beauty. Womanist theology embraces the diversity of African beauty and provides them with the right to define theology as it relate to their situations.

Like womanist theology, black theology subscribes to an embodied concept as well. James Cone maintains that, “the interplay of social context with scripture and

¹⁴ Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 63.

¹⁵ Mitchem, *Introduction to Womanist Theology*, 12.

¹⁶ Mitchem, *Introduction to Womanist Theology*, 13.

tradition is the starting point for an investigation of Jesus Christ meaning for today.”¹⁷

Cone shows that religion, when properly practiced, addresses physical, psychological, and physical requirements. As McClendon puts it – it is embodied religion. Jesus was partial to at-risk youth. Jesus would champion better housing, better schools, and would advocate for proper nutrition for these children.

Likewise the church should publically and privately become proponents for at-risk youth. One way for First Baptist to boost at-risk youth is to implement a mentoring program. This will show the community the church has become a crusader for their cause. Plus the mentoring program will position First Baptist as a staunch and stalwart fighter for the cause of social justice. However, the emphasis cannot only focus on the children spiritual wellbeing, but the focus should advocate for an all-encompassing approach, which cares for the complete person.

Again it is instructive to consult with Cone, who describes theology as anthropology.¹⁸ More precisely that theology deals with the human situation. It seeks to understand and articulate what God has to say about a particular community. More specifically, would does God’s word say about at-risk youth. God’s concern are holistic which includes spiritual healing and physical health. The church must respond with support and not only lip service. We cannot become excessively worldly and focus on their afterlife. We have to concentrate on what God has to say about their current condition and future potential. Black theology says that God is biased on the side of at-risk youth.

¹⁷ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 99.

¹⁸ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 87.

Since these young folks are culturally, economically, and socially disenfranchised, God advocates for them. Jesus will be with at-risk youth to free and dismantle all oppressive structures and systems. In other words, the church cannot be so holy that she becomes indifferent to the plight of people. An attribute of holiness is God's movement toward us. Dr. Tom Dozeman described holiness in term of God being an alien.¹⁹ The implication is that God lives separate from us, and that we cannot go to God. After all, God lives in heaven while humanity occupies the earth. This indicates an apartness and separateness, which potentially leads to other worldly definition of religion. However, God removes this separateness when the church embrace marginalized folks. God moves toward us when our actions support the cause of marginalized and poor people.

In other words, God leaves the scared isolation of heaven and moves toward humanity to champion the cause of social justice and liberation. In this manner God is actively restoring the social order. This approach is helpful for this at-risk mentoring project. Cheryl Sanders says the church is the principal arena in which empowered individuals, families, and communities, can devote their gifts and resources to the needs of others.²⁰ This communal response leads to a definition of salvation Sanders refers to as total transformation.²¹ Sanders' definition of total transformation equates to salvation in the sense of restoring right relations to victims of oppressed forces. In the parameters of this definition, a mentoring program for at-risk youth would qualify. This reformatory

¹⁹ Tom Dozeman, "Holiness" (lecture, August Intensive United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, August 17-21, 2015).

²⁰ Cheryl J. Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People* (Minneapolis, MN: WM Fortress, 1995), Kindle Location, 84.

²¹ Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics*, Kindle Location, 85.

idea of salvation warrants a second look. Note the conciseness her argument forms from a liberation point of view.

Sin is best understood as both personal and collective. In liberatory discourse the personal dimension of sin tends to collapse under the weight of the analysis of victimization, and its collective significance is reduced to an amalgam of sins of discrimination against those marginalized by their color, sex, economic status, and /or sexual preference. When salvation is equated solely with liberation, that is, with the attainment of freedom from oppression and discrimination, the moral and spiritual significance of personal formation too easily becomes obscured.²²

Sanders argument appears to coalesce around the notion of personal and collective ethics. She asserts that one cannot be achieved satisfactorily without the other one. Perhaps this language can be expressed to articulate right relations amongst disenfranchise folks within the community. To convey the notion that while we strive for total liberation this does not absolve from behaving ethically with your fellow neighbor. Sins of discrimination cannot be used to justify crimes and violence against your brothers and sisters in the community. There is a personal as well as communal response to sin, and both are equally important.

Sanders integration of personal and collective ethics dovetail well with James Cone Christological vision, which can be deduced from the following statements.

One has only to read the gospel to be convinced of the central importance of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. According to the New Testament, Jesus is the man for others who views his existence as inextricably tied to other men to the degree that his own person is inexplicably apart from others. The others, of course, refer to all men, especially the oppressed, the unwanted of society. The sinners.²³

Cone suggests that while Jesus supports the oppressed, God still requires civility and mutual love with our brothers and sisters. This love extends to all people, not only to

²² Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics*, Kindle Location, 91.

²³ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), Kindle Location, 638.

oppressed folks. Cone implicitly says that we cannot disentangle from others as a result of oppressive conditions or systems. Jesus Christ as liberator opens the possibility of mutual understandings. To have an experience with Jesus Christ reveals the meaning of God's actions in history and humanity relationship within it.²⁴

The relationship centers on human relationship towards each other. Jesus message should soar above economic, racial, and governmental ideologies. This human relationship requires difficult conversations about the state of our communities, income disparities, and all other injustices. It calls for candid discussions about using religion to further the economic and social strengths of the powerful.

If we do not partner together, we run the risk of present and future at-risk youth ideologically viewing God as a white racist.²⁵ Jones posed this question to rebut the rise of black theology. He likened black theology to a messianic vision of a promised messiah who would liberate African Americans from oppression and poverty. His misgivings about black theology seems to arise from the fact that these theologians did nothing to revamp and revise the polity and structures based on the white church. Also, Jones wanted to use a Black Humanism critique of the black church.²⁶ His attachment to human importance rather than divine or supernatural powers did not fare well. Jones concluded that black theology did not understand that staying within the black church tradition would compromise liberation efforts. His concerns were that interacting with white churches would only benefit the status quo and powerful, hindering the effort of

²⁴ Cone, *Black Theology*, Kindle Location, 645.

²⁵ William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), Kindle Location, 42.

²⁶ Jones, *Is God A White Racist?*, Kindle Location, 61.

black theology. Jones positions could potentially lead the community away from the church, and identifies humans as the sole and ultimate arbiter of what is right.

This viewpoint is not applicable for today's at-risk youth community. As Dwight Thomas and Linda Thomas remind us, our communities have become more diverse and increasingly pluralistic.²⁷ They ask the question does liberation change overtime? Or does it remain static and still meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community?²⁸ From a theological perspective, theology seeks to address the needs of the community today. It should not be bounded exclusively by yesteryear's themes and struggles but, should offer a fresh word for the inhabitants of today's time and situations.

While we honor the contributions of those before us. We cannot simply duplicate and devise strategies predicated on earlier generations. Part of the good news of the gospel, is that Jesus Christ is relevant for every generation. Christ's message of setting the captives free is applicable for today's at-risk youth. We only have to remove the "old wineskins" and articulate God's message into different applications and mediums. The black church is needed now, more than ever. The church needs to lessen its dependency on those with titles before their names, and speak the language of the common folk. This is theology, God talk, as it is spoken to specific communities.

Moreover, the demise of the black family structure has been labeled the chief issues facing the African American community. How would this contribute to more at-risk youth? The Moynihan report attributed malaise in the black community to the

²⁷ Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas, *Walk Together Children* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), Kindle Location, 14.

²⁸ Hopkins and Thomas, *Walk Together Children*, Kindle Location, 14.

sickness of the black family.²⁹ This statement tends to oversimplify a complex societal issue. It omits the stigma and violence slavery contributed to African American family erosion. It is silent on the economic and political forces eroding black family life. Such areas as income inequality and politically motivated directives like mass incarceration of young African American males. Such concentrated efforts on any community would cause family sickness. Roberts' response and remedy to lessen the strain for black families reminds us of the diversity of black families. The term nuclear family consisting of a father, mother, and 2.5 kids has been replaced by alternative family compositions.

But this is not new in the African American community. Roberts goes onto say that black families have always took on extended ties to form support systems.³⁰ Also black families were not limited exclusively to blood relatives. This is a carryover from our North American slavery experience. In fact, it was a survival mechanism specifically for enslaved children who were separated from their biological kin. Roberts recommends that these levels of consciousness and deep sense of kinship continue.³¹ He further elaborates that a feeling of belonging for people who are oppressed by racism leads to health, sanity, and wholeness.³² This is precisely the goal of the at-risk mentoring project. That is to say, a sense of belonging for at-risk youth will be created through an extended family network of mentors.

²⁹ James Deotis Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church* (Bowie, MD: The J. Deotis Roberts Press, 2003), Kindle Location, 2.

³⁰ Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future*, Kindle Location, 2.

³¹ Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future*, Kindle Location, 3.

³² Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future*, Kindle Location, 3.

Robert Franklin provides greater insight on this concept in his work *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*.³³ Franklin's call to a Pentecostal leadership derives its strength from the realization that Pentecostals make use of the high energy displayed by at-risks youth to convey a meaning of belonging to something larger than themselves. In other words, youthful energies are channeled away from destructive detrimental behavior to a communal good. Also, Franklin challenged this denomination to pool their respective wealth of intellectual, political, economic, and spiritual capital to working with at-risk youth.³⁴

Likewise, Franklin challenge African American Methodists to step up and lead the educational renewal of the entire village.³⁵ He wants to leverage the successful track record of African American Methodists educational achievement to assist the development of at-risk youth. According to Franklin, Methodists have a long history of promoting educational excellence and literacy. Methodists are regularly involved in local school boards and impoverished communities.³⁶

The final discussion for reentry and redemption is within the Baptist denomination. This call is for black Baptists to "assist people that have been incarcerated to reenter the village with integrity and support."³⁷ With the growing epidemic of mass incarceration of young black men, this is a needful ministry. Franklin advocates for the thirty to forty thousand black Baptist congregations, with an estimated ten million

³³ Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), Kindle Location, 1762.

³⁴ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1767.

³⁵ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1767.

³⁶ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1767.

³⁷ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1767.

members to lead the reentry and re-assimilation into the community effort.³⁸ Franklin goes on to say that experts expect future figures of 650,000 inmates will be released each year into the local community.³⁹ The theological significance of the statistics are mind blowing. How will the community speak to and support the number of inmates returning home? How will the church articulate the power of forgiveness and redemption to this large audience?

In addition to these questions how will the church and community back the sheer number of returning inmates who lost their rights to vote. They became even more disenfranchised from society, after losing the very basic citizen right to vote. Without this right to influence politicians – it becomes more contingent for the church to articulate their cause.

Michelle Alexander codifies and correlates the mass incarceration rates to the launch of the war on drugs.⁴⁰ She argues metaphorically that mass incarceration is the new Jim Crow and American caste system.⁴¹ Thus breaking up communities of color into divisions based on wealth, profession, occupation, and more importantly race.

Moreover, Alexander reminds us that the election of President Obama is dangerously misguided.⁴² She maintains that mass incarceration and the new racial caste

³⁸ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1725.

³⁹ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, Kindle Location, 1725.

⁴⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), Kindle Location, 8.

⁴¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Kindle Location, 11.

⁴² Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Kindle Location, 11.

system are attacks and backlash for civil rights gain.⁴³ According to Alexander, African Americans have been controlled through institutions like slavery and Jim Crow which appear to become extinct, only to resurface in a different form.⁴⁴ She suggest that during the immediate dismantling of the systems, there is a period of confusion until the power structure most committed to racial hierarchy seek new ways to constrain success within the existing new rules.⁴⁵ This thought really likens racism to an insidious version of the concept of energy. Metaphorically equating racism to the conservation of energy, whereby it cannot be destroyed rather it transforms from one form to another.

The presidential election of Barrack Obama is historical and without any reservation a positive direction for the country, yet, we cannot be lulled into believing that we now live in a color blind society. The truth is that Obama's rise to the top of American politics points to the evolution of black politics.⁴⁶ It would be unwise and unfair to think Obama's election would wipe away the national scars of Jim Crow, slavery, and lynching.⁴⁷ Peniel Joseph indicates that President Obama election does offer hope in the concept of American democracy one that African Americans have historically taken to heart. African Americans have fought in every war to preserve American democracy, and the overwhelming majority of African Americans value patriotism. Even with the realization that we're not always accepted equally or merit full human value.

⁴³ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Kindle Location, 11.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Kindle Location, 11.

⁴⁵ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Kindle Location, 21.

⁴⁶ Peniel E. Joseph, *Dark Days Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barrack Obama* (New York, NY: Perseus Books Group, 2010), Kindle Location, 4.

⁴⁷ Joseph, *Dark Days Bright Nights*, Kindle Location, 5.

Cone once again offers valuable insights from the perspectives of the cross and the lynching tree. He articulates, “that while the lynching tree symbolized white power and black death, the cross symbolizes black divine power and black life – God overcoming the power of sin and death.⁴⁸ Stanley Hauerwaus contends that the problem with Christian ethics in America was America.⁴⁹ By condensing and consolidating Hauerwaus thought the take away is that instead of the church acquiescing to American culture and its belief system, the church should stay true to its belief in Jesus Christ and share this belief systems to communities. He points to the founding fathers for using the ideology of sameness and repressing differences.⁵⁰ This thinking leads to a country honed by notions of a homogeneous society.

This would create a culture of sameness. When in reality America is a hodgepodge of various cultures and ethnicities. Where people of color are expected to reject their cultural identities and fully assimilate into America’s western value system. I take this a step further and say that Africentric values need to be embraced while maintaining the American identities. At-risk youth, like other American youth are thoroughly integrated into the American cultural value system. The project goal is not to eliminate it, but to bring awareness of African cultural values.

It is no different than Irish or Italian Americans maintaining their affiliations and customs with their country of origin. In fact, it makes them more well-rounded as they have the ability to recall their historical context, and how it fits into the overall American

⁴⁸ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), Kindle Location, 598.

⁴⁹ Stanley H. Hauerwaus, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2013), Kindle Location, 351.

⁵⁰ Hauerwaus, *A Better Hope*, Kindle Location, 428.

narrative. The premise is that an at-risk mentoring program featuring an Africentric framework will likewise bolster at-risk youth confidence and self-esteem. The goal is to augment their existing American cultural understanding with that of Africa. By doing so it will provide a fuller picture of their total humanity. Further, a new approach is needed for this generation. They are post-civil rights and many are not aware of Jim Crow, segregation, or many of the struggles previous generations endured. Or as Adam Taylor puts it;

Every generation can take for granted the struggles that came before them. However, in my generation's case, there is more going on than simply amnesia or lack of concern. Part of what is making us feel disconnected from civic activism is the degree to which the challenges and injustices of our current age have morphed into much more covert and institutionalized forms. Injustice continues to adapt to its new environment.⁵¹

This paragraph really encapsulates the evolutionary nature of social justice and black theology. While the past is honored and treasured, new generations need to identify relevant tactics for their era. Similarly, theological discussion needs to be reinterpreted for specific generations. Once again, you do not scrap or discard previous discussions instead they can still be deployed for lessons learned.

Yet, each generation must tell their story and do so by using contemporary language. Adam Taylor states, "that stories possess the power to unlock empathy, appeal to shared values, and convey deeper meaning than simply a restatement of events, facts or experience."⁵² This project will link at-risk youth's stories to an Africentric narrative because, for far too long this chapter of their history has been neglected. They have fell victim to someone else writing their story for them. The mentoring program will redact

⁵¹ Adam Taylor, *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), Kindle Location, 111.

⁵² Taylor, *Mobilizing Hope*, Kindle Location, 349.

this story by including the accomplishments and contributions of African people to the forefront.

Part of the redactive process will point out that our ancestors had a civilization and culture prior to arriving on the American shores. It did not begin when our ancestors were enslaved in America. We had a developed religious system as well. According to John Mibiti, “over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely work of God.”⁵³ The universe and all its forms and creation were understood to speak of God’s creative agency. Africans envisioned God as the great architect of the universe, who forms babies within their mother’s wombs. This is a needed corrective for those who believe that Africans had no systematic religious teachings. So it is important to include these facts into the stories at-risk youth will convey. An Africentric theology will facilitate the mentoring program.

Julia Speller highlights an important starting point for Africentric awareness. According to Speller, spirituality from an African perspective is special because it grows out of an experience of a unique people of color who have encountered a God who still sustains and liberates.⁵⁴ This relationship to God has been nourished throughout the African American community time in America. Through it all, God provided what we needed. God gave us support and relief through slavery, Jim Crow, legal segregation, and lynching.

This unwavering faith did not form in a vacuum. African Americans imported this from the African continent. An Africentric approach restores Egypt and Ethiopia back to

⁵³ John S. Mibiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Press, 2006), 39.

⁵⁴ Julia Speller, *Walkin’ the Talk* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 4.

their rightful geographical location – Africa. Both countries have contributed widely to Christian, Islam, and African Traditional religions. Scholars believe there were interactions with all countries in the continent and cultural exchanges.⁵⁵

According to J. Theodis Roberts, religion needs to be carefully selected, for it the most powerful tool of mind control ever created.⁵⁶ Blind faith in an individual or simply believing dogma without critically reflection is problematic, but the revelation of God is decisively embodied in Jesus Christ. Or as Migliore states it, “In Jesus proclamation ministry, death, and resurrection, and in the renewing work of the Holy Spirit a new relationship between God and all humanity is established.”⁵⁷ Also there is the opinion that the Africentric view that Africans outside of the continent have been cut off from their cultural heritage and this alienation from Africa affects at-risk youth. Africentrism maintain that our outlook is European. Meaning that since African Americans have been removed from the African continent for over 500 years that we consider Europe standards for music, art, theater, dance is the ultimate achievement.⁵⁸ The remedy is to place Africa as the center of our existential reality.⁵⁹ This may cause considerable anguish for some but this should not be the case, an emphasis on Africentrism stresses African agency.⁶⁰ This is a corrective to theories that placed Africa on the periphery of human contributions.

⁵⁵ Speller, *Walkin' the Talk*, 4.

⁵⁶ James Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 6.

⁵⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 24.

⁵⁸ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

⁶⁰ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

Africentrism calls for a collective consciousness, which applies to at-risk youth.

In the sense, that it mean taking action to address the needs of at-risk youth. Collective consciousness also applies to the church welcoming and nurturing these youngsters reach their full potentials. It borrows from the historical legacy of African American churches galvanizing the community to collectively take care of our children.

This mentoring program is based on the notion of placing African culture front and center in the mentoring program. It is prioritized without devaluing European or other cultures. Africentrism is pro black without being anti-white. As Roberts asserts, we need to be inclusive in embracing Africentrism.⁶¹ That is to say, while cherishing African and African American cultural history, we do not minimize the cultural history of other people. This is the theological foundation constructed for the at-risk mentoring program. This framework will assist at-risk youth regain confidence, faith, and increased self-esteem.

⁶¹ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 57.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

There appears to be a sort of callousness or indifference about the suffering of these children, which go unnoticed within the membership of First Baptist Church. At-risk youth need someone to address their needs. If their needs go unattended, they are the faces of the next generation of poverty and economic disenfranchisement. These children if left on their own, will become ignored and isolated from the prosperity of the city. In a way, their situation is analogous to a tale of two cities. If you drive less than two miles north of the church, the composition of the community changes drastically. You see run down homes, pot holed roads, children faces hardened by despair and destruction. Even their schools appear badly in need of repair. The schools are laced with graffiti, asphalt, and cement. There are few open spaces with greenery and flowers at this supposed place of learning. Instead the school looks more like a preparatory place used to prepare these children for future incarceration.

The plight of First Baptist at-risk youth may not be as literally dramatic as Charles Dicken's opening prose in *A Tale of Two Cities*. There are similarities in the treatment of France's youth, and the indifference shown by the monks and pastors that parallel today's at-risk youth. It maybe hyperbole to equate France's youth who had hands torn off, tongues torn out, and bodies burned at the stake for failing to kneel down to the processions of priests and pastors – to that of today's at-risk youth. Certainly, this

is not the case for at-risk youth near First Baptist but many parishioners of First Baptist seem to ignore the condition of at-risk youth.

Contrast this troubling environment to the children a couple of miles away. A casual observer will notice charter and magnets schools near this neighborhood. The homes are well kept with manicured lawns. You will not find any potholes in this neighborhood. The children here, seem cheerful, and have the look of optimism most children possess until circumstances or people attempt to curve it. This is a primarily African American neighborhood, yet, their infrastructure looks strikingly different from that of at-risk youth. Many of these residents attend First Baptist and drive through the at-risk neighborhood on the way to church.

The differences between the children's experiences are disturbing. One neighborhood has more advantages and better resources. While the other one seems forgotten and destined to failure. Who can blame these at-risk children for their apparent lack of joy? Their experiences have taught them only the strong and tough survive. Show weakness and it is harder to survive. The lure of gangs and drug dealing is hard to walk away from, when you live in this community.

This project cannot immediately change these children status, however, it will offer more of a long-term strategic view. The ministry focus is to implement a mentoring program for at-risk youth. This chapter will examine contemporary literature relevant to at-risk mentoring programs. While the primary context relates to African American at-risk youth, the research will also examine at-risk mentoring programs for Latino, Mexican, and poor Caucasian youth. Taking this approach will expand the view, and will reflect the lens on any at-risk mentoring program which may be a social justice issue.

Another objective of this project is to capture the voice of at-risk youth. Boykin Sanders reminds us too often we silence the marginalized, and it is important to remember any outreach must capture the victim's story in their own words.¹

The hypothesis is that a mentoring program for at-risk youth will help improve self-images. A better self-image ultimately benefits the community, and integrates at-risk youth into the church and overall society. A residual outcome of a mentoring program is that it strengthens church and community bonds. Another objective of this project is to activate a stronger awareness of social justice praxis within the church. It will also serve as a resource for at-risk youth to interact and form professional connections with leaders of the community. It also helps the church establish a secession strategy. The mentoring program will teach the word of God and develop future disciples of Jesus Christ. Another assumption is that an at-risk mentoring program will improve self-esteem.

Moreover, the mentoring model will provide a commitment to the community, by nurturing seeds of community revitalization. Also using the notion of community cohesiveness learned via Africentrism will limit the risks associated with being labeled an at-risk youth. The mentoring program will not necessarily increase church membership immediately. However, over time a mentoring program will provide the catalyst for effective ministry in the lives of at-risk youth. The mentoring program is needed because the church must not leave the needs of these children unanswered. During the course of this project, I examined to what extent the psychological affect, the environmental, and designation at-risk, project on the psyche of at-risk youth. Psychological literature will

¹ Boykin Sanders, *Blowing The Trumpet in Open Court* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002), 71.

validate or disprove this assumption. There are several questions listed below that must be answered in order to test the preconceptions.

This project examines psychological literature evaluating the effect of low self-esteem for adolescents. It will elaborate on the psychological product of the media and how this effects youth. The project explores the Dialectical Behavior Technique (DBT). This psychological tool helps youth channel calming techniques to deal with high emotional triggers. It is necessary to address these issues because children with low self-esteem become adults who do not cope well in society. Long-term effects vary and often materialize as adults who never fully assimilate into the community. A subset of these folks have problems relating to others or have difficulties forming relationships. Left unresolved, many of these children become adults who have a negative opinion of self. Which manifest in anger, shame, and sometimes these youth develop violent tendencies toward others.

This project proposes that the church provide outreach to mitigate these risks. The intent is to provide a positive environment for these children. This includes a nurturing space for these children which accentuates their lives have value and worth. To reaffirm, the community values them; and that God loves them unconditionally. The children can experience the value of the community by using several mentoring models. For instance, the church could use a group model, one-on-one mentoring model, peer, group, or Internet model. The most important thing is to commit to whatever model chosen. It is also noteworthy to mention the church should incorporate best practices from secular mentoring models. Secular models should be used to help meet the need for mentoring at-risk youth. However, churches offers a more comprehensive approach, as it addresses the

spiritual, as well as, communal needs of at-risk youth. We can borrow successful mentoring techniques like music, improving cultural awareness, and discuss class dynamics. This project examines both secular and church based approaches.

1. What are psychological methods that would alleviate some of the pain experienced by at-risk youth?
2. What are potential long-term psychological affects at-risk youth may develop?
3. How can the church mentoring program counter risks associated with at-risk youth?
4. What mentoring models are available for at-risk youth?
5. Should secular models be used?
6. What best practices should the church borrow from secular mentoring models?

Robert Gossett urges men of color to become mentors. He suggests that many men do not do so because of the misconception that it requires a huge commitment in money and time.² He maintains that instead of viewing mentoring only as a commitment, Gossett recommends viewing mentoring as a way to give back to the community as a show of love. He views the shortage of mentoring as a national emergency within the African American community. Reportedly only six percent of African American men participate in mentoring programs for at-risk youth. Gossett claim regarding men of color serving as mentor is a valid one and women of color should be included as well. The need for more

² Robert Gossett, "Urges Men of Color to Mentor," *New York Amsterdam News* 98, no. 25 (June 14, 2007): 40, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid&custid=s7502202&db=f5h&AN=25469958&site=ehost-live>.

male mentors is understandable, but it limits the value of female mentors who can speak more effectively to at-risk girls.

Also, of note, Gossett's mentoring program is completely secular. The religious community does not participate in the program. However, a Christian educational component to the mentoring program would be advantageous. It would provide a moral foundation established on biblical principles. Gossett's mentoring initial outreach is to Los Angeles gang members, his primary purpose is to become a father figure for these at-risk youth.

Horace Hall uses a different approach. Hall responds to the inequalities and adverse conditions faced by African American youth. Hall focuses on issues such as socioeconomic status, cultural stereotypes, and community violence.³ The author notes that mentoring is a way of intervention that is commonly used to develop these individuals and improve their aptitude, cultural identity, and educational competence. Hall includes other topics such as academic achievement, employment, and role of nonprofit mentoring group Young Men for Change (YMC) to further enhance his model.

Like Gossett, Hall omits the church from his mentoring approach and subsequently leaves out a valuable resource. Especially when a component of the mentoring framework seeks to improve at-risk youth cultural identity. The church can assist with improving at-risk youth cultural identity. The black church is arguably the crown jewel of African American culture. Africentrism can also be leverage from a cultural perspective and it a great start to initiate at-risk youth to their culture. This would

³ Horace R. Hall, "Food for Thought: Using Critical Pedagogy in Mentoring African American Males," *Black Scholar* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 39-53, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid&custid=s7502202&db=f5h&AN=108801115&site=ehost-live>.

provide a proper historical cultural identity for at-risk youth. Noting the contributions of African peoples would help awaken their understanding of African contributions to humanity.

Nikki Brown builds and expands upon Hall's argument for improving cultural awareness. Her article "New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina," incorporated Hall's work and added additional voices. Brown's view of mentoring includes community groups, churches, and civil right training.⁴ This mentoring approach includes life skill training for African American youth by culinary instructor Joe Smith. Also discussed are topics like civic equality, civil rights activism, and racism and its impacts on democracy. The mentoring program emphasizes the historical traditions of African Americans, including oral histories, and black politics.

On the other hand, Wendy Struchen maintains the isolation of youth has many negative consequences. Asserting that when at-risk youth are unaware of their cultural identities, which she frames as isolation, it is a major factor in the nation's high school dropout rate.⁵ According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, students who drop out of school often cite the lack of a single person who cared about them as one of the primary reasons for leaving.⁶ These students had a weak attachment to the school and had

⁴ Nikki Brown, "New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina," *Black Scholar* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 10-23, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid&custid=s7502202&db=f5h&AN=108801113&site=ehost-live>.

⁵ Wendy Struchen and Mary Porta, "From Role-Modeling to Mentoring for African American Youth: Ingredients for Successful Relationships," *Preventing School Failure* 41, no. 3 (1997): 119, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid&custid=s7502202&db=f5h&AN=9708105179&site=ehost-live>.

⁶ Struchen and Porta, "From Role-Modeling," accessed May 15, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid&custid=s7502202&db=f5h&AN=9708105179&site=ehost-live>.

no close social bonds with teachers and staff. Mentoring programs are a way to bridge the chasm between young people and caring adults who could make a difference in their lives.

Mentoring has become a popular approach to targeting the needs of youth. Mentors act as surrogate family members to children and fill the void created in broken homes. Although the term mentoring is commonly used to describe adult-protégé relationships, it is not clear exactly what mentoring is and how it should be carried out. Does mentoring mean an intensive one-to-one match that an adult spends eight or more hours a week with a child? This is a relevant question and deserves careful thought.

The article mentioned the term “drive by mentoring.” It refers to mentors who are initially enthusiastic about the program and later do not show up. This is problematic for at-risk youth who may have abandonment issues, and the article reiterates the need for mentors to commit for a specific timeframe. In some respects, mentors become surrogate families for at-risk youth. Many of these children come from unstable homes, so mentoring should not add to their sense of abandonment.

With this thought in mind, Talise Moorer considers mentoring as the first line of defense for Black youth.⁷ Moorer suggests mentoring is needed to serve as a counterbalance to the dominant culture’s hegemonic influence over minority communities.⁸ She expands on her argument and asserts that the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties and seventies failed to address the cultural, economic, and political influence over the African American community.

⁷ Talise D. Moorer, “Mentoring on the First Line of Defense for Black Youth,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 15, 2007, 37, accessed August 17, 2015, *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost.

⁸ Moorer, “Mentoring on the First Line of Defense,” 37.

Moorer argues from a different mentoring perspective. According to Moorer, hip-hop music is a reaction to the Civil Rights Movement lack of ensuring better circumstances for the underclass. Therefore, Moorer recommends mentoring programs to address the social constraints facing at-risk youth. The approach includes classes on economics, cultural biases, and teaching African American history. She argues for including and incorporating hip-hop music history and its effect on urban and American culture into at-risk youth mentoring programs.

In a similar fashion, Robert Price mentoring structure also places prominence on hip – hop music as a mentoring tool. The article analyzes the impact of hip hop culture on youth in a cultural youth movement or the Harlem Renaissance period in the U.S.⁹ The article cites several books that traces the emergence of the hip hop culture during the Harlem Renaissance and how it has affected the social development of African American youth.

Price discusses cultural generational shifts that brought the cultural gap between hip-hop culture and Civil Rights within the black community. Price maintains that adult educators failed to recognize the black popular culture in an urban context.¹⁰ Further, he presents a comparison between the Harlem Renaissance and the hip-hop culture relative to spirituality, youth and representation, mentoring, the streets, the concept of masculinity, and the role of whites. The article recommends utilizing hip-hop music to bridge the generational divide, and to connect with at-risk youth. Although the article mentioned spirituality, it failed to convey how this would be implemented in a mentoring

⁹ Robert J. Price Jr., “Harlem Renaissance Cultural Movements, Rap Music,” *Convergence* 38, no. 2 (2005): 55-64, accessed April 17, 2016, *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Price, “Harlem Renaissance Cultural Movements,” 55-64.

setting. The article omitted any reference to the black church, which like hip-hop music has been a reactive force to speak about the underclass.

Another approach to mentoring likens mentoring to a jazz ensemble. At a recent afternoon practice, jazz drummer Zach Harmon facilitates mentoring for members of the jazz combo at Washington Preparatory High School. The group is off to a rocky start, and it is Harmon's job to help get them back on track. "What happened to your solo?" Harmon asks the keyboard player. "I got lost," the young player answers. Harmon turns to the drummer and the saxophonist. "I didn't hear any communication between the rhythm and the horns. Really start opening up your ears," he tells them, sounding a lot like two of his own mentors, pianist Herbie Hancock and trumpeter Terence Blanchard.¹¹

Before reaching the pinnacle of musical success, Hancock and Blanchard were not much different from the young musicians at Washington Prep. Despite being sincere, talented students, they had to rely on professionals like Harmon to point the way.¹² Today, Hancock and Blanchard develop opportunities for public school students interested in jazz by connecting them with professional musicians who want to give back to the community. "How else are people going to find out about the cultural history of America if they don't find out about jazz?" says Hancock, the institute's chairman.¹³

This mentoring approach advocates discussing the cultural benefits and relevance jazz music contributes to the overall society. Furthermore, music is used to develop discipline, and communication skills for the mentees. They are taught to understand the

¹¹ Eddy Ramirez, "Ambassadors of Jazz in Tune with Youth," *U.S. News and World Report* 145, no. 12 (December 2008): 53, accessed April 17, 2015, *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost.

¹² Ramirez, "Ambassadors of Jazz," 145.

¹³ Ramirez, "Ambassadors of Jazz," 145.

collaboration between different instruments and musicians, as well as, understand their role within the overall group. Specifically, how their preparedness either negatively or positively influence the group's music. So that the students understand the interdependency each member of the jazz group share.

On the other hand, Michael Richardson, a program director of the James P. Beckwourth Outdoor Education Center, a peer mentoring and education program that takes Denver youth on wilderness adventures.¹⁴ Richardson has led the Beckwourth youth program since its inception in 1998, and he teaches a tough-love approach. His mentoring model teaches Denver's youth: respect, responsibility, leadership, and love of the outdoors. Through adventures like hiking, mountain climbing, and outdoor survival skills the program teaches urban kids to appreciate the wilderness and expand their capacities as individuals and as members of a team.

The program is free to children aged eight to eighteen and offers more than thirty-five trips year-round on public lands in Colorado and nearby states. Once admitted to the program the kids are free to participate in numerous activities such as: hikes, overnight camping trips, snowshoeing, and stewardship projects such as reforestation, trail-building, and habitat restoration. Kids find the mentoring program through word of mouth, flyers at schools, and relationships with social services agencies. This model is not limited to African American youth. It applies equally to poor whites, Latino, and Mexican youth. The model has a more diverse application and addresses the needs of poverty as well as, cultural risks.

¹⁴ Terrell Johnson, "100 Black Men of Atlanta," *Georgia Trend* 21, no. 12 (August 2006): 11, accessed April 17, 2015, *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost.

While these mentoring models are much needed and serve a great need. My attention now turns to Christian models of ministry for children. These models are not specifically designed for at-risk youth. However, my position is that any mentoring model developed for the church must naturally be based on Christian principles through a social justice and liberation understanding.

Elisa Pulliam says, “we’re not here for adoration or worship of God only, although that is number one. If that were all we’re here for, God could take us straight to heaven, where our worship would be undistracted. No, the reason God leaves us here for a while is so that we can make a mark on others.”¹⁵ Pulliam seems to be promoting the communal opportunities mentoring provides. Another aspect of the model suggests that mentoring brings us together in a way that God designed. As Solomon reminds us in Ecclesiastes – there is nothing new under the sun. At-risk youth are marginalized, poor, and powerless. These are not new issues, but have confronted and evaded each preceding generation.

When you compound these with cultural and sociological issues, at-risk youth need guidance and instruction from believers of Jesus Christ. They need mentors to help address their concerns about worth, values, and appearance. Mentoring will help quench their longing for unconditional love, which can be found explicitly in God through Christ Jesus. Pulliam does a nice job pointing out the individual concerns but, does not address the issues of minority at-risk youth, and how these questions that plague all youth, are exponentially compounded for minority youth.

¹⁵ Elisa Pulliam, *Impact Together: Biblical Mentoring Simplified* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2008), 262.

Similarly, Comstock emphasizes that mentors must be conformed to the likeness of Christ. He goes on to assert that a mentor is someone a mentee observe and decides consciously or unconsciously to copy.¹⁶ The implication is that mentors must develop godly characteristics so that the life of Christ will be reflected through us.¹⁷ Arguably, mentors must have a vibrant and tangible relationship with God. So they can authentically speak about the love of God, and how God cares for each of us beyond our understanding.

Comstock rightly emphasizes prayer, meditation on scripture, and discipleship, but omits to mention God's stance on the oppressed, marginalized, and poor. Jesus incarnation consisted of establishing right relations between humanity and God as well as, correcting the social order. Jesus indicates that what we do to the least of these is really for him. Therefore, a mentoring model is incomplete without addressing the social and economic disparities, which affect at-risk youth.

Dale Hanson Bourke, challenge women to find passion and purpose for the rest of your life.¹⁸ The framework is designed for middle-age Caucasian women who are empty nesters. These women have adult children who do not live at home. The general theme of the book is to release the experiences and lessons learned in life to benefit a child. The book proposes that women primarily mentor girls.

The underlying theme is that because women and young girls share the same gender, it leads to better bonding and mentor mentee relationships. Burke specifically

¹⁶ Roy L. Comstock, *Mentoring His Way* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2010), 213.

¹⁷ Comstock, *Mentoring His Way*, 214.

¹⁸ Dale Hanson Burke, *Embracing Your Second Calling: Find Your Passion* (Nashville, TN: Thompson Nelson Press, 2009), 145.

sees this as a benefit for preadolescence girls who may have body image issues. That is to say, those girls who negatively compare their bodies and looks to super models and sports illustrated models. Burke's mentoring program serves as a corrective for these unrealistic and often photo shopped versions of beauty. Instead, Burke prioritizes the beautiful and unique individuals God created.

Similarly, Robert Hoggard offers a mentoring program specifically for boys. He discusses the value of mentoring from the perspective of the mentee, and the positive affect mentoring has on the overall society. He asserts that the benefits of mentoring for adolescents are having a good self-image, and a high quality sense of self-esteem.¹⁹ He further elaborates that young children are a product of their cultural and social environment, and should be assigned virtually zero responsibility for the personality he or she has developed.²⁰

He suggests this should be attributed to parents or adult figures primarily around the children. So Hoggard calls for one on one mentoring as the best vehicle to assimilate young children into society. He also suggests that organizations like the boy scouts, girl scouts, Salvation Army, and Peace Corps helps to bring out the highest level of human achievement.²¹ These organizations are suggested because they perform at higher levels by addressing community issues.

On the other hand, Doline and Brady advocates for a more traditional mentoring approach. They define their model as:

¹⁹ Robert Hoggard, *The Mentoring of Male Youth* (New York, NY: Abington, 2012), 47.

²⁰ Hoggard, *The Mentoring of Male Youth*, 106.

²¹ Hoggard, *The Mentoring of Male Youth*, 106.

The process by which a more experienced, trusted guide forms a relationship with a young person who wants a caring, more experienced person in his or her life, so that the young person is supported in growth, towards adulthood and the capacity to make positive social connections and build essential skills is increased.²²

The crux of this model derives from relationships. This means that mentors must facilitate and form relationships with at-risk youth. Many of these children have been abandoned and forsaken by parents and other relatives. So it imperative that mentors commit to being there throughout the mentoring program. After all, mentors will play a significant role in the lives of the youth. The mentors will be trusted guides with young people desiring more experienced caring person in his or her life. A prerequisite is that the adult is a Christian leader who will support the youth in growth towards adulthood. Also, there should be an emotional bond and a sense of trust between the mentee and mentor.

Table 2 below describes the various mentoring types. For purposes of this project, a team-based approach was used to mentor at-risk youth.²³ This project will use a group-mentoring model. Regular meetings and events will be utilized to enable a mutual relationship with the youth.

²² Pat Doline and Bernadine Brady, *A Guide to Youth Mentoring: Providing Effective Social Support* (Philadelphia, PA: Kingsley Publishing, 2012), 97.

²³ Doline and Brady, *A Guide to Youth Mentoring*, 129.

Table 2. Definitions of mentoring types

Mentoring Types	Definition
One-to-one Mentoring	This form of mentoring involves the formation of a relationship between an adult and a young person. Typically, the requirement is that they meet weekly for a minimum of one year.
Group Mentoring	Group-based mentoring involves an adult forming a relationship with a group of up to four young people. The mentor commits to meet with the group regularly, the purpose of which may be for fun, teaching or specific activities. The sessions generally have some structure and are led by the mentor.
Team Mentoring	This form of mentoring involves several adults mentoring a small group of young people.
Peer Mentoring	In peer mentoring, a young person is supported to develop a caring relationship with another youth.
Internet Mentoring	Internet or e-mentoring involves a one-to-one relationship between an adult and a young person which takes place online. The pair may have some initial face-to-face meetings but continue to communicate via the internet at least once a week.

The discipline of psychology will also be used to investigate applications for at-risk youth. More specifically, psychological literature for adolescents and how these findings are transferrable for at-risk African American youth will be evaluated. One psychological aspect that affect at-risk youth and youth generally is an unrealistic body image. Cultural and societal influences affecting at-risk youth dramatically.

One of the most terrible influences at-risk youth and youth in particular face is the temptation to compare themselves with others. The universal truth of puberty is rapid body change. Youth often compare their bodies to the altered images used by marketers,

in advertising on social media.²⁴ “The New York Times” article goes on to say, as a result of this negative self-image, many kids are using dangerous substances such as, laxatives to lose weight, and muscle building products to gain size and muscularity. This leads to body shaming and reliance on harmful substances like laxatives, creatine, steroids, which produces harmful effects on adolescent youth.²⁵

Thirteen thousand American children were studied to determine the effects of harmful images. Growing Up Today Study (GUTS) revealed that between the ages fourteen to twenty-five, 10.5% of women in the study reported using laxatives to lose weight, and 12% of men reported using muscle-building supplements.²⁶ The study concluded that parents play a reassuring part in kid lives. The research showed that people, who have more body satisfaction, take better care of themselves by eating healthier and exercising more often. This leads to well-adjusted adults. Parents or mentors can help counter the false images, which bombard American youth. These are startling statistics. A mentoring program for at-risk youth must emphasize everyone is created uniquely and loved by God. That everyone is beautiful in the eyes of God, and there is not one ideal bodily form, God values diversity.

²⁴ Peri Klass, “Attention Teenagers: Nobody Really Looks Like That,” *New York Times*, August 1, 2015, accessed May 15, 2016, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/attention-teenagers-nobody-really-looks-like-that/?partner=Bloomberg>.

²⁵ Klass, “Attention Teenagers,” 4, accessed May 15, 2016, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/attention-teenagers-nobody-really-looks-like-that/?partner=Bloomberg>.

²⁶ Klass, “Attention Teenagers,” 4, accessed May 15, 2016, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/attention-teenagers-nobody-really-looks-like-that/?partner=Bloomberg>.

In the article “Catch ‘Em Young,” James Heckman argues that the accident of birth has substantial life-long consequences.²⁷ Heckman goes on to say that family environments are major predictors of adult cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. He advocates for preschool programs to offset the decline in two parent households. Citing the Perry treatment research that preschool programs return rates of return of 15 – 17% for children for those who attended preschool.²⁸ The study also suggests that cognitive skills are raised when children attend preschool programs.

In addition to enhancing cognitive skills, Hahn suggests that fledgling psychopaths can be identified as early as kindergarten.²⁹ The article insists that you can teach potential psychopaths empathy before it is too late. The research here is inconclusive. Some psychiatrists dispel the notion of testing for anti-social behavior to identify potential psychopaths.

The research shows that many of the children once thought to be anti-social, became more social after they became teens. Similarly, many who exhibited anti-social behavior when taught how to be empathetic by parents or caring adults learned to become more compassionate. So the notion of lacking empathy may have become less of a factor once the parents of these kids began teaching compassion. This article reaffirms the idea of a mentoring program. While the article advocates for preschool programs which help

²⁷ James J. Heckman, “Catch ‘Em Young,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 2006, accessed May 15, 2015,
<http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/399020868?accountid=44872>.

²⁸ Heckman, “Catch ‘Em Young,” accessed May 15, 2015,
<http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/399020868?accountid=44872>.

²⁹ Jennifer Kahn, “Trouble, Age 9,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 13, 2012, accessed May 15, 2015,
<http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/399020868?accountid=44872>.

nurture intellectual development. The article failed to mention the effect of poverty and institutional factors affecting cognitive development. Similarly, the stress of living in poverty was not factored. How does systemic othering through the media and advertisement contribute positively or negatively to cognitive development? This question was not addressed by the article.

Perhaps as Dana Linden says, schools should offer mental health classes for students across the country.³⁰ The context Linden applies to adolescents cutting themselves due to emotional instability. Dialectical Behavior Technique (DBT) used for a sample of seventy-seven teens showed a lower occurrence of teens injuring themselves than other treatment options.³¹ Dialectical Behavior Technique aims to help teens regulate their emotions and teach skills to avoid injuring themselves when emotions arise. The article indicated that social media posts about cutting sometimes lure curious teens to try it out. The expert indicates these teens engage in non-suicidal cutting as a way to alleviate stress, shame, anxiety, and other negative emotions.³² The approach helps people change patterns of behavior that are not helpful by learning the triggers that cause them to harm themselves. It is also used to treat traumatic brain disorders, eating disorders, and mood disorders. My assumption is that DBT may be used to help at-risk youth deal with their emotions more effectively. The mentoring program will encourage

³⁰ Dana Wechsler Linden, "Schools Face the Teen Cutting Problem: Efforts to Stem a Rise in the Number of Adolescents Found to be Engaging in Self Injury, Especially Cutting," *Wall Street Journal*, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/16990606?accountid=44872>.

³¹ Linden, "Schools Face the Teen Cutting Problem," *Wall Street Journal*, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/16990606?accountid=44872>.

³² Linden, "Schools Face the Teen Cutting Problem," *Wall Street Journal*, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://ezproxy.ranchomiragelibrary.org:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/16990606?accountid=44872>.

honest conversations. This would require the appropriate training from medical and mental health professionals. It would also require creating a safe space for at-risk youth to share their feeling.

Conclusion

After researching at-risk youth mentoring programs and the psychological effects of this labeling, the various research models indicated that mentoring programs are necessary and relevant. This included faith based and secular mentoring models. The assumptions were that only the church could adequately address the needs of at-risk youth. However, it is believed that the black church offers the best model for African American youth, because of the cultural nuances of this specific group, but there are value propositions in some secular programs.

The most important characteristics of a mentoring program hinge on the desire to help the mentees and committing wholeheartedly to forming mentor mentee relationships. Another presupposition was that team mentoring is the best framework for any program. During the course of the research, one-to-one, peer, group, and Internet mentoring are all viable and proven methods. The resources helped to place at-risk youth in proper perspective. Models such as the one described in Colorado, broadened the definition of at-risk, previously the African American lens was solely being used. Now, poverty and economic scarcity affect white and Hispanic youth as well.

So the issues of at-risk youth span all demographics. The church models reviewed primarily focused on the spiritual component. While this is important, they do not attempt to callout the economic component at-risk youth encounter. This project

seeks to educate at-risk youth about systemic structural issues including economic disparities. The psychological literature reviewed focused on improving at-risk youth self-esteem and the benefits of self-esteem in a media manic society. The literature reinforced believed assumptions that in order to value oneself and others fully requires a positive self-image.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

This project has been a labor of love and toil. It has been a great journey where I learned as much as I presumed to pass along to the kids. The original and final purpose of this project is to implement an at-risk mentoring program for children living near First Baptist Church. My rationale for pursuing this project began after evaluating information from the department of justice about at-risk youth. According to the Justice Department, JUMP (Juvenile Mentoring Program) successful mentoring is necessary to combat the rise of inappropriate youth behavior. These statistics strengthened my resolve to implement an at-risk mentoring program for the youth of the community.

However, the unfavorable statistics confronting at-risk youth appeared almost insurmountable. As the following table reveal, these children have serious challenges, and require intervention from caring adults in order to improve their chances of becoming productive adults. My position is the church should become more invested in the lives of these youth.

In other words, the church should create its own mentoring programs specifically for our communities. This is not a new concept, but returns to the black church original praxis of caring for its own. Previous generations pooled their resources collectively to care for its community. They understood the importance of a collective existence. Mainly

that we could not afford to leave anyone behind. They understood that God supports the poor, marginalized, and at-risk.

Table 3 highlights the troubling behavior and stratifies the percentages into female versus male at-risk youth.¹

Table 3. Risk domains faced by at-risk youth being served through JUMP

Risk Domain	Females	Males
School Problems	64.5%	76.4%
School Behavior	26.7%	40.4%
Poor Grades/Failure	50.7%	60.2%
Truancy	10.1%	11.1%
Social/Family Problems	57.7%	54.0%
Delinquency	10.3%	18.9%
Fighting	8.1%	14.2%
Property Crimes	0.8%	3.7%
Gang Activity	1.2%	3.8%
Weapons	0.7%	1.2%
Alcohol Use	2.0%	4.5%
Drug Use	2.6%	5.1%
Tobacco Use	2.2%	3.1%
Pregnancy	2.4%	0.2%

This table highlights aberrant behavior and the percentages broken down by gender show that at-risk youth are more likely to share in these undesired activities. The article goes on to say the majority of youth being served through JUMP projects face multiple risk factors in several domains of their lives. Family related risk factors are commonly noted by these youth. The same report list several more statistics, which disproportionately

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, "Evaluation of the Juvenile Mentoring project," accessed February 13, 2015, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/app/publications/abstract.aspx?id=189127>.

affect at-risk youth. A brief description of the data follows. As a result of the following factors impacting at-risk youth furthered my resolve that a mentoring project is necessary.

This project implements a mentoring support structure that offers alternatives to end the perpetual issues at-risk youth encounter. The continuation of these factors will not end as a result of this project. Our goal is more nuanced. The purpose is to bring awareness of at-risk youth condition to the church, to collectively empower our children. We empower them through improved self-esteem and to challenge at-risk youth not to view themselves as academically inferior, or damaged. Instead, the youth should view themselves properly, as beautiful, intelligent children, made in the likeness of God almighty.

The project primarily applies to risks identified and related to problems in school because research has demonstrated that difficulties in school both constitute an immediate risk factor and serve as an indicator of potential more serious problems. The prevalence of school problems supports the need for early interventions such as those provided by mentoring. In addition, there are some youth who identified problems with gangs, weapons, substance use, and pregnancy risk factors, indicating a subset of mentees who appear to be in a very high-risk group. While not a substitute for appropriate family involvement and intervention, this project seeks to reduce the impact of these risk factors by providing positive relationships with adult role models for at-risk youth.

Intervention

The position is that implementing a mentoring program based on social justice and Christian principles would help alleviate some of the barriers that confront at-risk youth. Another residual effect is that creating such a mentoring program would help increase a positive self-awareness that would lead to increased self-esteem. The second component of the mentoring project would offer classes and techniques to develop critical thinking skills. The overarching goal is to combat negative stereotypes, and improve at-risk youth academic and thinking skills. Understanding that critical thinking skills serves well for entry to higher education, and whatever occupation one chooses.

First Baptist has been a loyal and dedicated practitioner of social justice since the church inception. Its beginning in 1812, was an act of social justice. Twenty three courageous Christians dared to establish an interracial church comprising fourteen African slaves and nine Europeans prior to the abolishment of slavery.

The establishment of the church itself displays an act of social justice. Therefore, it is with this legacy of social activism this project seeks to bring anew. Particularly, to position the church as a strong supporter of at-risk youth residing near the church. The project requires commitment from the membership, and a willingness to appropriate financial and human capital for this resource. The 2010 census report revealed that youth between the ages ten - fourteen years old comprise 23% of the downtown population. Within this slice of the population, many of the youth are categorized as at-risk.

Research Design

The mentoring program objective is to interact with at-risk youth living in communities adjacent to the church. The outcome is to have a mutual positive effect on each other. Desirable in the sense, the church provides Christian mentors to develop the emerging and in some instances, unseen talent of at-risk youth. Cultivation and refinement of their talent in concert with the word of God, will help increase overall self-esteem of the youth. The hope is to lessen the allure of the neighborhood gangs, and empower at-risk youth to live up to their true potentials.

The mentoring program attempted to augment the education at-risk youth encounter with critical skill development. This project provided seminars and techniques to help at-risk youth learn to think critically and logically. The purpose is to help at-risk youth evaluate information which often label them as insufficient and lacking inherent qualities necessary to succeed. This project attempted to clarify and explain this dichotomy to at-risk youth. The instrument used to clarify and correct these distortions is the gospel via the lens of black theology.

Before launching the mentoring program a survey was distributed to eighty-five randomly regularly attending members. It was sent to gather support of the program. The survey was sent via email using Google form. Out of the eighty-five sample, a response was received from thirty-five members. This was a 41% response rate with overwhelming support to proceed with the mentoring project. The five survey questions are listed below.

1. Would you like to participate in a mentoring program?
2. What would you expect to learn from a mentoring program?

3. Are you willing to lead discussions about mobile technology?
4. Would you like to learn skills in communication, critical thinking, and collaboration?
5. What does social justice and Liberation Theology mean to you?

What I did not anticipate was the seemingly enthusiasm to start a mentoring project from the respondents. The majority replied they would participate as mentors, and thought it was a good idea. They commented that we need to get more involved with outreach to the community. Many wanted to give back to the community and help shape the future of a child.

What surprised me was although most people wanted to participate, there was little awareness about liberation theology and black theology. Many responded that liberation and black theologies were tools used during Jim Crow to secure black folk freedom. Some suggested that it may not be appropriate for today. Indicating they did not understand the applicability for today's youth. I relayed my findings to the church leadership, as this is a teaching opportunity for the overall congregation. The first class began as scheduled and I developed this class with the theme we are made in the image of God. The objectives of the class were to show that humanity began in Africa, to confirm the Bible and Modern Science agree on Africa's origin of humanity, to indicate why is it important for at-risk youth to have this knowledge and to know how will affect their lives for better or worse.

On March 6, 2016, the first class began with Genesis 1:26 -28 serving as the foundational scripture, which states:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God

created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

This text was chosen purposefully. It was to begin with the origin of humankind, and to reinforce the brother and sisterhood, and equality of all human beings. I conveyed my reasons specifically to the youth. God created all peoples and nations with the purpose of inhabiting the created world. Since we are made in the image of the Creator, we have creativity, value, and worth. Humans are the highlight of God's creation. Men and women were given the command to go and replenish and be good stewards of creation. Stewardship can be thought of as managing the earth for the good of all. This lesson also touches on secular history which confirms Africa's prominence in the history of humans.

For instance, most modern scientists believe that humans began in East Africa about 2.5 million years ago.² From this origin, humans left East Africa and populated other areas of the continent, settled in Asia, and Europe. This date is proven by archaeologist usage of carbon dating to determine the age of human fossils or bones. From my very limited understanding of this technology, scientists are able to detect certain carbons left within the bones to determine approximate age. Supposedly, all matter leave certain traces of carbon. The participants were encouraged to conduct additional research for the purpose of developing critical thinking skills.

One question that was posed to the group was: Why are we talking about old bones? I bring it up to show that the Bible and science agrees as it relates to where people originated. Genesis means beginnings. In the beginning all people began on the continent of Africa. Oftentimes, Africa has been portrayed as backward, evil, unsophisticated, and

² Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2015), 7.

not contributing anything to human history or civilization. This is not true. In reality, Africa is the cradle of civilization. Africans contributed to science, art, poetry as did all human beings. When you think about it, it is like the song Shakira sang several years ago, "we're all Africans." I know some of you may be too young to remember it, but you can look it up on YouTube.

In discussing beginnings, it is useful to understand your heritage and history. This helps to provide a starting point in your relationship to all of humanity. To let you remember that you are on equal footing. It does not mean that Africans are better because civilization began there. Nor does it mean that it is inferior because the culture, language, and worldview differs from the West, primarily Europe and America. I suggested that the participants' become more familiar with their ancestry and their achievements as this would enhance their relationship with God and other human beings.

For instance, look at your friends that are Irish, Italian, Indian, or English decent many of them merge their ancestral lineage with their American identity. It helps to know where you come from and helps shape the present and future. Also knowing who you are, and where your ancestors came from helps to provide a sense of identity in this large and complex world. Learning about your cultural past might confirm somethings you always wondered about, or shed light on things you never considered.

Those are some of the reason for starting this mentoring program. It is one facet of this project used to enrich lives. During the course of these four weeks, we provided a basic foundation in Africentrism and black theology. In fact, two classes will be devoted to those topics. Here is why it is important because when movies are made about biblical

characters, or internet searches for biblical information, or when we read most Christian magazines - none of the folks look like Africans.

What does that do to a community psyche? When I see a movie or watch a video about the Bible and all the folks are white. It promotes a subconscious image that people who look like me are not very important. That God loves a certain group of humans more than my particular group. This may potentially cause anger. It may advance a belief that you are not as intelligent or lack the brain power of others. These distorted and erroneous images are intentional. They are used to create a narrative that Africans did not contribute anything of value to humanity.

Yet, Africans established the world's first colleges or universities. The first universities Timbuktu and Egypt were located in Africa. Timbuktu is in the country of Mali, it is a West African country. It is a landlocked country bordering Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and other west coast African countries. Egypt regardless of what some may say is in Africa. It is important to know the original inhabitants of Egypt look different than today. You should know that multiple countries have conquered Egypt and altered the genetic makeup of the country.

Finally, let me add, that it is important to understand your ancestry because it makes you better-rounded. If you know that your ancestors developed sophisticated religious belief systems, understood the physical world, and created art and music. I assert to each of you this knowledge strengthens your belief that you are an equal member of the human race. You are not superior, but neither is anyone else. The truth of this aligns to Acts 17:26, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit

the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their land.”

So it is my duty to let you know that all humans share the same bloodline. We are one people who may look different, but I assure you that it is merely a small difference. We were created by God to live in community. No one has the right to believe they are superior, or that other humans are inferior. When we discussed Africentrism and black theology, I reminded them that we do not assume to be superior to our white brothers and sisters, nor do we believe that God created us with any less value.

The question and answers period lasted for ten minutes. I asked them to stand, tell everyone their name and grade level. For purposes of privacy, I will only list the grade level for the questioner. A Seventh Grader asked the question: “If everyone came from Africa why isn’t everyone black?” Response: That’s a very good question, and I will answer it honestly and say that I don’t know. I can tell you what I believe. I believe that God loves diversity or differences. You see it in the plant kingdom, different color flowers etc. You see the differences in the animal kingdom, different colors of dogs which belong to the same breed. Some will say that when people left Africa and moved to other parts of the world, they adapted or changed to adjust to the climate and environment. Is this true? It is a theory that many people believe. What I will say to you, is that people are more alike than they are different. If anyone says that you are inferior – do not believe them. God equipped all people with the same ability to do great things. We have the very essence of God residing within you and me.

A Fifth Grader asked the question: Is God black? Response: Another good question, which I will have to answer with my beliefs and match it to scripture. The Bible

confirms that God is a Spirit. That is the image part all humans share. I also believe that God is light and cannot be limited to a physical body. God's Son Jesus Christ did take on a human form. It can be debated if Jesus is white, black, Asian, or other. I believe that Jesus was a person of Color based on the region he was born. I cannot say definitively that he was black.

The kids only asked two questions. Afterwards, we had ten minutes left, so I passed out a survey and asked them to complete it before class ended. The survey contained five questions which are listed below.

1. Did you enjoy the class?
2. What did you like most about it?
3. How can it be improved?
4. What did you learn about Africa?
5. What did you learn about the way God loves you?

The class said overwhelmingly said they enjoyed the class. When I asked what they liked most? Their answers converged on two themes. They liked that I did not use the outdated Sunday school material which depicted only white children. They also did not like the pictures of shepherds and sheep as it meant little to them. As far as improvement, they commented that I should include videos showing the African countries we discussed. Many of the children did not know that Egypt is located on the African continent. Nor did they know there were universities before they existed in Europe. What surprised me the most, is that a couple of the children said they did not believe that God loved them less because they were poor. Their question was more along these lines. If God loved them why did they not have new things, or live in a big house. I reassured

them that being poor had nothing to do with the degree of God's love. That in fact God is always on the side of the poor. These comments renewed my resolve to change their understanding of God's love. This falls in line with the project's purpose which is to addresses the systemic structures and hurdles which impedes at-risk youth from reaching their full potentials. The gospel of Jesus Christ and Africentrism are reformatory ideologies used to change at-risk youth perceptions about themselves.

The second class was held on March 13, 2016 with the topic of the "Introduction to Black Theology and Africentrism." The foundational scripture was Exodus 3:7- 12.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the land of the Egyptians and to bring them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up and out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey- the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites have reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt? "But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be a sign to you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

The objectives of the class was to relate this scripture to black theology, show how the African slaves transposed their condition to that of Israel, articulate God's partiality to the oppressed, show that God will be with the oppressed every step of the way. The slave ancestors used this scripture to make sense of their situation in America. You see the enslavement between the Israelites and African slaves were very similar. A powerful country enslaved them. Both had been subjected to cruel treatment. I must confess when I was about the age of the participants; I did not like talking about slavery. When black history month came around, we only mentioned folks like George Washington Carver,

Fredrick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. There were others but I often wondered how they became our heroes. Who chose them? Were there others history failed to mention?

Perhaps my shame was due in part, because I somehow felt the Africans accepted slavery without any resistance. They did not fight back – so I felt ashamed. This text helped me then and now to visualize justice. As Dr. Andrew Sung Park puts it, “the oppressors need salvation from their own sins, while the oppressed need liberation from the domination of the oppressors.”³ Park goes on to say that this level of shame is called Han.⁴ He describes Han as a collective shame which people of a specific race, gender, or class develop. For African Americans, our shame is a result of our ancestors being sold as objects, and experiencing unprecedented discrimination and racial prejudices.

Although this may be true to a certain extent, black theology is beneficial to alleviating the shame of slavery. My shame developed from a lack of knowing my history. This is where black theology is helpful. I did not know that when the slave ships arrived in West Africa from about 1550 – 1850, they were met by inhabitants of cities, advanced people, with sophisticated civilizations.⁵ African societies used stories to socialize or teach how to behave in the community. African societies held theology or speaking about God as the primary means to prepare young people for the community. The story form used familiar symbols and animals to bind the child to the community.⁶

³ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press 2004), 4.

⁴ Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 44.

⁵ David Emanuel Goatley, *Were You There? God Forsakenness in Slave Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 2.

⁶ Goatley, *Were You There*, 2.

Many of these tales were transported from Africa to America where the slaves continued this oral tradition.

It is important to realize that slaves brought this oral legacy to America. Family relationships, values, and community obligations were important to the slaves. The stories hid survival strategies, because it was dangerous to openly discuss escape. Black theology reminds us that Africans resisted attempts to dehumanize and devalue their self-worth. They used their cultural traditions to interpret slavery in their own terms.

It must be remembered these tales often consisted of a trickster theme. There were animal trickster stories where the weak manipulated the strong.⁷ These trickster tales helped slaves rethink their lives in bondage. Additionally, the trickster stories served to enhance the slave's self-esteem and created a sense of community to be sure these trickster stories were significant as was the biblical stories. Slaves were forbidden to read and write, so they could only use their memories and storytelling to pass along biblical truth. The issue was that plantation preachers would mostly justify the system. They would preach that Africans were sinners and slavery rescued them from their sins. Because these preachers goal was to maintain the social structures and keep the economic benefits of the slave system intact. This version of Christianity attempted to convince the slaves of their inferiority and justify the slave economic system. Overwhelmingly this perverted version of the gospel did not gain traction with the majority of the slaves.

The slaves would not accept this watered down racialized version of Christianity. Instead they formed the invisible church in the hush harbors and swamps of the south. This church did not have walls and a lovely sanctuary like our beloved First Baptist. Instead the slaves would quietly go to the isolated fields and swamps where they could

⁷ Goatley, *Were You There*, 3.

worship God in their own way. This in itself was quite an achievement because the slaves were illiterate and uneducated, and lacked the ability to read and understand the scriptures. They memorized scriptures and relied upon their past African culture as tools to interpret God for their situation. In essence, their African belief systems kept them from believing that God intended for them to be slaves and the properties of others. Slaves primarily memorized and repeated the Exodus stories featuring Moses the promised liberator. The slaves identified strongly with the oppressed Hebrews. Like the Hebrew they were disenfranchised and dehumanized. Both clung to remnants of their cultural identities to keep from going insane. Based on their understanding of the biblical stories, slaves blended their West African cultural orientation with Christianity.

God has always cared for the poor and oppressed throughout history. The black church is a direct response of this belief. The black church selection of particular verses supports the biblical calling to address issues affecting the poor, outcast, and powerless groups represented in society. This particular scripture portray God's concern for the Israelite slaves. He says I have heard their cry. Moreover, I am about to do something about it. Although this scripture speaks to the Israelite situation, God's word is a living word and relates to all people who are oppressed and live on the outer limits of society. God still says I am concerned about you. I care about your lives. It is true that black lives matter. They are important to God almighty who always sides with the poor and downcast?

God cares that African American children are more likely to be poor. That 36% live below the poverty line.⁸ Poverty is more than living below a certain income bracket.

⁸ Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh, *Hope for Children in Poverty* (Valley Forge, PA: Harper Judson Press, 2007), 18.

It usually affects families with other problems such as lacking adequate resources to purchase proper nutritional food, and clothing. The lack of the basic necessities in life often contributes to young people sense of hopelessness. This scripture reminds us that God did not intend for anyone to be in this situation. Black theology reminds the church that the people of God must respond to these injustices. Black theology reaffirm that Christianity addresses the whole person and that Christianity as Jesus taught seeks to heal the mind, body, and spirit.

If the church concentrates only on the spiritual aspect of salvation it is partially fulfilling our call. James Cone the Father of Black Theology, states that Jesus is the object and liberation of salvation.⁹ Meaning that Jesus' mission as mentioned in Luke is, "to set the captives free." That is free the poor and marginalized from systems of bondage. These systems of bondage manifest in different forms. It can be inadequate housing, inferior schools, crime filled streets, gangs, or the feeling that no one cares about you.

This mentoring project is designed to let at-risk youth know we care about them. We want to encourage and empower them to become the very best God has equipped them to become. We are available to assist in developing your God given talents. My belief is that a mentoring program will improve self-images. Participants were encouraged to see themselves as God sees them.

Following the class the survey was issued and the feedback is indicated below:

1. What did you learn from this lesson?

⁹ James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two: 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 87.

The feedback from this question was pretty consistent. The majority of the youth were unaware of the culture Africans had before coming to America. They did not realize there were cities, or that Africans had their own highly developed religious systems. Many did not know that African mixed Christianity with their African traditional religions. I had a couple of responses stating that African American music comes from our ties with Africa. Well they put it in their own words, but I was happy they were able to make the connections.

2. How did it make you feel?

I did not get any major themes from this question. Some of the kids said they felt ok. Others said, they did not know. My assumption was this topic would elicit strong emotional responses, but it did not. I had one response that said it made them feel sad.

3. What did you learn new about slavery and our ancestors?

Some of the answers were they fought back in their own way. Others said they were brave. I had responses saying they did not learn anything new.

On March 20, 2016, the third class was held on Africentrism and the objectives were to introduce Africentrism, describe Africentrism beginnings, and describe what it means for African Americans youth.

J. Theodis Roberts states that religion needs to be cautiously chosen, for it the most powerful form of mind control ever created.¹⁰ He cautions Believers that blind faith in an individual or simply believing dogma without critical reflection is problematic. This is a warning not to suspend thinking when worshipping. You should not leave your brain at home Sunday mornings. Bring it with you to the service, as God created our entire

¹⁰ James Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 6.

being to participate in worship. This keeps Believers prepared to challenge erroneous teachings.

Furthermore, Roberts warns against a single culture controlling theological discussions. After all, theology is God talk. It means to discuss religious beliefs and ideas, which cannot be limited or controlled by a single racial or ethnic group, but must include all peoples and cultures. Similar to black theology, Africentrism attempts to bring the African continent front and center in the theological discussion. For too long Europe and America have been the dominant voices in theological debate. All other cultures acquiesce to Europe and America as they set the bar for Christian God talk.

By the same token, any theological discussion outside the Western value systems has been construed as defective and lacking credibility. Africentrism challenge this dominant view of theological discussion. Africentrism says that Africans Americans have been cut off from their cultural heritage and that Africa is left out of the religious conversation. Africentrism assert that our outlook is European. Meaning that since African Americans have been removed from the African continent for over 500 years, European benchmarks has become our norm. For example Europe sets the ideal for music, art, theater, and dance, and quality is seen through a European lens.¹¹

The remedy to this cultural malaise is to return Africa at the center of our existence or reality.¹² This may cause considerable anguish for some but this should not

¹¹ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

¹² Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

be the case, an emphasis on Africentrism stresses African agency.¹³ This is a corrective to theories that labeled Africa as other, and not contributing to human history.

Africentrism calls for a collective consciousness, which applies to at-risk youth. In the sense, that it means taking action to address the needs of at-risk youth. Collective consciousness also applies to the church welcoming and nurturing these youngsters to reach their full potentials. It borrows from the historical legacy of African American churches galvanizing the community to collectively take care of our children.

In other words, the church should stay true to its belief in Jesus Christ and share this belief system to communities. The American founding fathers used the ideology of sameness and repressed differences. This thinking leads to a country clinging to a notion of a homogeneous society. To be clear a society cherishing European or Western values.

When in reality America is a hodgepodge of various cultures and ethnicities. What is problematic is that people of color are expected to reject their cultural identities and fully assimilate into America's Western value system. I disagree with this approach, and assert that Africentric values need to be embraced. While maintaining their American identities, at-risk youth, like other American youth should thoroughly integrate their ethnic origin into the American cultural value system. The project goal is not to eliminate our American heritage, but to bring awareness and inclusion of African cultural values into full view.

This mentoring program is based on the notion of placing African culture front and center in the mentoring program. It is prioritized without devaluing European or other cultures. Africentrism is pro black without being anti-white. As Roberts asserts, we

¹³ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 6.

need to be inclusive in embracing Africentrism.¹⁴ That is to say, while cherishing African and African American cultural history, we do not minimize the cultural history of other people.

This is the theological foundation constructed for the at-risk mentoring program. This framework will assist at-risk youth regain confidence, faith, and increased self-esteem. This project supports adopting Kwanzaa principles for community healing. Kwanzaa honors African American history and culture. It starts December 26th and last through January 1st. The seven principles of Kwanzaa or Nguzo Saba are beneficial for at-risk youth mentoring. Kwanzaa emphasizes a communal African philosophy, highlighting the best of African thought. There are seven days dedicated to Kwanzaa, and each day aligns to an African principle.

Umoja (unity) Strive to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.
 Kujichagulia (self-Determination) Define and name ourselves, as well as to create and speak for ourselves

Ujima (Collective work and responsibilities) To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers and sisters problems our problems and solve them together.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia (Purpose) to make our collective vocation building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their original greatness.

Kuumba (Creativity) To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited.

Imani (Faith) To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.¹⁵

¹⁴ Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 57.

¹⁵ Julia Speller, *Walkin' the Talk* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 87.

Summary and Observations

I reassessed and decided not to use surveys for the third class. The youth were very attentive with little fidgeting. Based on the survey returns from earlier classes, the youth partially answered the questions and stated they did not want surveys after each session.

I decided to accommodate them and use a more interactive approach. Meaning after the class I asked if anyone wanted to comment on what we just discussed. There were fifteen youth in attendance, and almost immediately seven hands were raised. The comments varied a bit, but the top three responses were discussed. 1) The youth asked why the church did not have Africentric programs for Easter and Christmas. They said it would be nice to see the plays and programs performed from an Africentric perspective. 2) The youth liked the Kwanzaa principle of Ujamaa or cooperative economics. They said if this was practiced it would remove some of the hate or jealousies in the community because everyone would work and share in the profits, no one would be left poor, hungry, or unable to buy new clothes and sneakers. 3) They liked Kwanzaa. A couple of the youth said they liked the week long holiday. They said it should become an official holiday but use days that did not coincide with Christmas. They wanted to formally celebrate Kwanza on a different day. I asked them if this recommendation was to get an extra week out of school. Surprisingly they said no, that it should be celebrated in a different month, because more folks celebrate Christmas than Kwanzaa.

On Saturday, April 9, 2016 the Critical Thinking Seminar was held. The fourth and final class was originally planned as a seminar with a lecture. However, the team decided to break out into four teams of five youth. As opposed to lecturing critical

thinking skills, which would probably bore the kids unnecessarily. Also the original intent was to have a mobile application programmer join the class and introduce the youth to programming. Unfortunately, my colleague got the flu a few days prior. So we had to quickly improvise.

I assumed the role of observer. Each mentor were given the critical thinking workbook. We developed a template to assist the aid the youth in critical thinking. We handed out and explained a rudimentary problem solving template: “Widen your options – deactivate your biases, by expanding on the possible alternatives; Reality test your assumptions – Get outside of your head and collect information you can trust. Ask many questions; Attain distance before deciding – any outcome; Prepare to be wrong.”¹⁶

The group chose the game or problem they wanted to solve. Observing the groups I quickly noted that all the youth were involved with the games. Prior to starting the exercise the mentors agreed to encourage the youth to solve these problems with few interruptions from the mentors. We encouraged them to ask questions of each other, and to listen with an open mind. Further, we asked them to trust their instincts, and not to be afraid to fail. Emphasizing that failure is part of the learning process and it sharpens your thinking skills. It was evident by watching the youth, this was the highlight of the project. At the conclusion of the exercises, each group presented their solution. They chose a spokesperson to present, but everyone in the group prepped the presenter.

Summary of Learnings

I am grateful that First Baptist allowed me to partner with at-risk youth and piloted this mentoring project. My initial assumptions was that at-risk youth needed

¹⁶ Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 4.

improved self-esteem in order to mitigate the risks hindering their progress. In fact, I assumed that black theology and Africentrism would be the best methods to foster improvement. I sincerely believed that if committed Christians devoted time and effort to mentor these kids – it would make a difference in their lives.

To this extent, I believe that we were successful. This statement is based on the feedback I received after the critical thinking seminar. I saw smiles on the youth faces, and a sense of comradery. Once more I did not hand out the prepared survey. Instead, I followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and opened the mic for the kids to share their experiences over the course of the classes.

I was surprised when many of the youth thanked us for taking time to talk with them and listen to what they had to say. One young man tearfully said that we treated them with respect and he was grateful. The kids also surprised us by asking if they could interview us. The first question I was asked – was why did I want to start a mentoring program for them? I told them that as a Christian I believe that God calls us to move beyond the church sanctuary and change our communities. I also told him that when I look at all of them, I see unlimited potential. I told them I have witnessed their keen intellect, their great senses of humor, the cool way they turn a phrase, and most importantly – we have bonded spiritually. I assured the youth that the mentors probably enjoyed this as much as they did, that we learned from each other, and we thanked them for allowing us to share this time together.

Conclusion

The project worked. The continued cooperation of the kids verified the project was successful. We started with twenty youth and with the exception of sickness, and family obligations, the children attended the sessions. I based the success criteria on the narrative method of data gathering. We simply asked for their honest feedback, and solicited ways to improve the project in the future.

One of the lessons I learned from the project is to limit the lecture portions. We gathered more input when a question and answer approach was used. For instance, instead of continually addressing talking points, pause at the conclusion of each section and ask for feedback and thoughts. I would also incorporate videos in subsequent projects. The youth mentioned that, but unfortunately I could not locate any in line with our schedule.

What I take away from a mentoring program is that it is important to be authentic. We did not change our personalities or language. We stayed true to who God created us to be. In similar manner, I encouraged the youth to be brutally honest about the mentoring experience. I would also eliminate the surveys in the future. This part did not work well. It appeared burdensome to the youth. They asked me pointedly, why do we need to complete the surveys? Can you just ask us? As a follow-up the mentors want to establish a long-term mentoring program. The mentors expect to meet the second quarter of the year to discuss implementing a permanent program. We also want to include a tutorial component in the mentoring program. So that we can assist the kids with homework, and teach effective study and test strategies. I believe the most important

requirement of a mentoring program is to have committed mentors who genuinely care for the youth.

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